

• GOD •
AND THE
GROCERYMAN

HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook *

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: God and the Groceryman

Date of first publication: 1927

Author: Harold Bell Wright (1872-1944)

Date first posted: May 1, 2020

Date last updated: May 1, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200501

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Chuck Greif & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

THE SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS
THE CALLING OF DAN MATTHEWS
THE WINNING OF BARBARA WORTH
THEIR YESTERDAYS
THE EYES OF THE WORLD
WHEN A MAN'S A MAN
THE RE-CREATION OF BRIAN KENT
THE UNCROWNED KING
HELEN OF THE OLD HOUSE
THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR
A SON OF HIS FATHER
GOD AND THE GROCERYMAN

GOD AND THE GROCERYMAN

BY
HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO
1927

COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

Copyright, 1927, by The McCall Company
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DAN MATTHEWS	1
II. BIG DAN'S PROBLEM	9
III. THE GROCERYMAN	37
IV. A STRANGER IN WESTOVER	50
V. THE GROCERYMAN'S DAUGHTER	66
VI. PAST AND PRESENT	81
VII. ONE EVENING	92
VIII. THE FARM	117
IX. MR. SAXTON'S DINNER PARTY	133
X. SUNDAY	167
XI. GEORGIA RETURNS HOME	196
XII. TRAGEDY	213
XIII. GETTING TOGETHER	230
XIV. NEW VALUES	249
XV. IN AN UPPER ROOM	260
XVI. THE PLAN	271
XVII. MOTHER AND DAUGHTER	312
XVIII. BUILDING THE TEMPLE	328
XIX. WORSHIP	338
XX. HAPPINESS	350

GOD AND THE GROCERYMAN

CHAPTER I

DAN MATTHEWS

IN a suite of offices high up in the Union Mining Building in Kansas City, an old negro janitor was engaged in his humble evening tasks. Save for this ancient colored man the rooms were deserted. The place was unmistakably a center of large business interests. The dark, rich woods of the paneled wainscoting, heavy moldings, polished desks, and leather upholstered chairs, the bronze fixtures, steel filing cases, and massive vault door, all served to create an atmosphere of vast financial strength.

It was an evening in spring—one of those evenings when the cold discomforts of winter are far enough in the past to be forgotten while the hot discomforts of summer are so far in the future that no one need think of them. From homes and hotels and boarding houses, from apartments and tenements and rooms, the people were going forth to their pleasures and their crimes or to the toil of those who must labor in the night. Roaring street cars, screeching fire engines, clanging gongs, blaring horns, heavy murmuring undertone of the city's life. Brilliantly illuminated restaurants, gleaming show windows, glittering, winking, flashing electric signs, dazzling arc lights, shadowy alleys, dark doorways, nooks and corners.

Mighty rivers of hurrying, crowding, dodging pedestrians. Vociferous newsboys, furtive drabs with shame to sell, stolid merchants, slinking followers of nefarious trades, nurses, clergymen, sly beggars, laughing merrymakers, purveyors of vice, children, impassive policemen. As the old colored man with broom and dust cloth moved about the quiet office rooms he crooned the wailing melody of an old-time hymn.

Suddenly the old negro ceased his crooning song. Without straightening up from his stooping position over the desk which he was polishing he paused in an attitude of rigid alertness much like a good pointer dog, his gray woolly head cocked attentively to one side. It came again—the heavy, jarring rumble of distant thunder. Shuffling to the nearest window the old man looked into the night. Below him the city stretched away in the gloom like a dark, unfathomable sea. The shadowy masses of the higher buildings were misty headlands, the twinkling lights were stars reflected in the black depths, and the noise of the streets came up to him like the roar of the surf. A flash of lightning ripped the night and he saw the wind-tossed clouds.

“By Jack, hit sure am a-comin’,” the old man muttered nervously. “Yas sah—reg’lar ol’ rip-snorter—Bam! Lissen at dem hebenly guns! Lawdy—Lawdy! Dem big black clouds am sure a-pilin’ up—whoo-ee! Look lak de judgment day am here right now—hit sure do. I knowed my ol’ rheumatiz warn’t lyin’ nohow—*No sah—No sah!*” He turned from the window and as his eyes took in the familiar rooms a wide grin deepened the wrinkles in his old, black face. “Ol’ man storm, he ain’t nohow gwine come in dese here offerces though—no *sah!* Rumble an’ grumble an’ shoot yo’ ol’ lightnin’ and blow yo’ ol’ wind twell yo’-all bus’ yo’sef—

yo'-all ain't gwine git ol' Zac in here—no *sah!* Dem pore folkses outside, dey sure gwine ketch hit, though—yas indeedee—dey sure *am!*” Wagging his head sorrowfully he again stooped over the desk.

But scarcely had the old negro resumed his work when again he was interrupted. This time he jerked himself erect and faced about with a quick movement surprising in one of his years. Some one had entered the outer office. A moment later a man appeared in the open doorway of the room where the janitor stood.

“Good evening, Uncle Zac.” The man was smiling at the expression of the old servant’s face.

“Ev’nin’, boss—ev’nin’, Mista Matthews, sah.” He bobbed and grinned with genuine delight. “But what fo’ de lan’s sake fetches you down here at yo’ offerces dis time o’ night? An’ hit a-fixin’ to storm like all git out, directly, too. Lissen dar!” An ominous roll of thunder punctuated his remark.

“Does look like it meant business, doesn’t it?” Dan agreed, moving to the nearest window.

“Hit sure do, sah—hit sure do. An’ iffen you’ll ’scuse me, sah, yo’ ain’t got no call to be a-comin’ down town on er wil’ night like dis gwine be. Yo’ jes’ better hustle ’long back home, right now, fo’ de storm break. Yo’ kin tell Missus Hope ol’ Uncle Zac jes’ naturally discharged yo’ an’ yo’ quit.” He chuckled at the thought of discharging the boss, and Dan laughed with him.

“Why don’t *you* run home before the storm breaks, Uncle Zac?”

“Me? Me go home dis early? Why, Mista Matthews, sah, I ain’t *near* finish ma work yet.”

“My fix exactly,” returned Dan.

Another blinding flash of lightning was followed by a crashing peal of thunder. The old negro regarded his employer with an expression of proud hopelessness, the while he nodded his head solemnly. “Man’s work ain’t nebbah gwine be finish, I reckon—no sah—not when he’s that kin’ of man.”

Twenty years had passed since Judge Strong and his brother officials of the Strong Memorial Church in Corinth drove Dan Matthews from the ministry because he would not preach the kind of Christianity they wanted. But the years had worked little outward change in this son of Young Matt and Sammy Lane. “Big Dan,” he had been called in his backwoods home, and the name bestowed with so much admiration and affection by the Ozark mountaineers clung to him still. Not only to his intimate friends but to his employees—laborers, miners, officials, clerks, to the newsboys on the street, and to the kings of Big Business he was still Big Dan. True, there were touches of gray in the shaggy, red-brown hair. The sensitive mouth smiled not quite so readily, perhaps. But the brown eyes—his mother’s eyes—were still clear and steady and frank, with Sammy’s spirit looking out, questioning but unafraid. One knew instinctively that his nickname was not used in reference to his great body and powerful limbs, alone. The years had given him, too, a certain quiet air of authority—of responsibility and power. In that place of large business interests he was as a captain on the bridge of his ship, or a locomotive engineer in the cab of his engine.

“Missus Hope, she am well as allus, sah?”

“Very well, thank you, Uncle Zac.” Dan came and seated himself on a corner of a desk near the janitor. “She was asking about you at dinner this evening. I expect she’ll be going to see you and Aunt Mandy before long.”

The old negro’s face beamed with pride and delight. “Thankee, thankee, sah. Lawd bless her dear heart. Mus’ be mighty lonesome fo’ yo’ an’ Missus Hope, all ’lone in yo’ big house wi’ de boys an’ lil’ Missee Grace erway to dey schools an’ colleges.”

“It is that,” agreed Big Dan, “but I guess we’ll have to stand it, Uncle Zac. I suppose, next thing we know, we’ll wake up some morning and find that we are grandparents.”

“Go ’long wid yo’! Shoo! Hit warn’t more dan yest’day yo’ oldes’, Masta Grant, war a-layin’ in he cradle makin’ funny faces at ol’ Uncle Zac.”

They laughed together. Then Dan, with the same courtesy he would have shown one of his business associates, asked: “How are your folks, Uncle Zac? Aunt Mandy feelin’ pretty pert these days?”

“Sure am, sah. Ol’ woman feelin’ so persnickety almost kick up her heels an’ prance roun’ like yearlin’ filly, sted o’ behavin’ like ol’ work mare wid her chilluns all growed up an’ mighty nigh ready to be gran’pappies an’ gran’mammies theyselves.”

“Good for Aunt Mandy! And how are you making out with your old friend, rheumatiz?”

“Ben makin’ out fine, sah, twell las’ night, ol’ man rheumatiz he come roun’ prognosticatin’ this here storm.”

“That’s too bad. I’m sorry, Uncle Zac. Perhaps you had better lay off for—”

“*No, sah—no, sah.* Ain’t nobody gwine ’tend yo’ offerces but me, Mista Dan. Rheumatiz, he ain’t so *bad*, nohow—jes’ sort o’ weather projectin’. Ain’t hurt *much*. No rheumatiz in ma soul yet. Everythin’s all hunky-dory long ’s rheumatiz stay in man’s lags. Rheumatiz gits in de soul—whoo-ee—look out *den!* *Yas, sah—yas, sah—dat am bad!*”

“Well, there is nothing the matter with your soul, Uncle Zac.” Big Dan’s hand dropped gently on the toil-bent shoulders and the brown eyes of the boss looked smilingly down into the janitor’s wrinkled, upturned face. “It’s one of the cleanest, truest, whitest souls I know.”

“What’s dat, sah?” The old negro gazed at his employer with startled eagerness. “What’s dat yo’ sayin’, Mista Dan? White? Yo’ reckon ol’ nigger man like me can hab white soul?”

“Why not, Uncle Zac?”

The old man wiped his eyes with a corner of his dust cloth.

“Lawdy, Lawdy, Mista Dan, to think o’ yo’ sayin’ a thing like dat! White—Lawdy, Lawdy!”

“Well, Uncle Zac, I must get to work.” Dan crossed the room toward his private office.

“Yas, sah—yas, sah—we bof o’ us got to work.” With sudden energy Uncle Zac applied his dust cloth to the nearest piece of furniture. “Ol’ man storm, he gwine git to work too—mighty sudden now. Can’t cotch us in dis here place, though—no indeedee!”

“Mr. Saxton will be along presently. Tell him to come right on in, please.”

“Yas, sah—yas, sah.”

As the door closed behind Big Dan, Uncle Zac stood looking after him. “Ain’t dat jes’ like him now,” he muttered to himself. “Ain’t dat jes’ like him to think o’ a thing like dat? White—white—Praise de Lawd!”

The old negro janitor stooped vigorously to his task and again the distant roar of the city was accompanied by the crooning melody of an old-time hymn.

CHAPTER II

BIG DAN'S PROBLEM

DAN MATTHEWS, alone in his private office, did not sit down to any work. Standing before his big desk, he idly fingered a silver paper knife, pulled open a drawer, closed it again, pulled open another drawer and took out a paper, glanced at it and put it back. The flashes of lightning were almost continuous now while the jarring roar of the accompanying thunder told that the storm was near. Big Dan turned from his desk to pace thoughtfully up and down the heavily carpeted room. As he moved to and fro one might have thought that he was nervous because of the threatening elements. He went to the window and stood looking out over the city—homes, churches, dens of vice, shops and factories, stores, retreats where criminals hide, houses of shame, dance halls, theaters, night schools, police stations, tenements, the black night, the play of lightning, the crash of thunder, the fury of the wind-torn clouds.

The door opened.

Glancing over his shoulder, Dan greeted the man who stood on the threshold with a brief: "Hello, John," and absorbed in his thoughts, turned his face again toward the city and the storm. Evidently the relationship between himself and the newcomer was so close and so well established that a more elaborate welcome was unnecessary. The man closed the door behind him noiselessly.

John Saxton was about the age of his employer, and while he was not nearly so imposing in stature as Big Dan, his

personality, in a way, was as striking. The quiet inner strength of the man was unmistakable. One felt instinctively that he was rich in experience beyond most men and that his judgments of men and events would always be governed by that large charity without which even justice is impossible. While in general appearance he was clearly a man of large business affairs, his face was the face of one who had suffered deeply and in his eyes there was that brooding look which is so characteristic of those who, even in a crowded world, live much alone.

Without turning his head, Dan called: "Come here, John—come look at this." And Saxton went to stand beside his chief.

For some time the two men watched in silence. Then Dan spoke. "I'm sorry, John, to bring you out on such a night; but I'm leaving for New York early in the morning and this is really my only opportunity to go over that business with you. It's lucky you returned to-day."

"I am very glad to come," returned the other quietly. He took a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "I have my report here, whenever you are ready."

Something in John Saxton's voice—a suggestion of loneliness, perhaps, seemed to touch Big Dan, or it might have been that the storm had thrown him into a peculiar mood. Turning from the window, he looked full into his companion's face. "John, do you know that you are almost the only man left to keep my faith in humanity alive? I have always found it easy to believe in God but these last few years it has been mighty hard, at times, for me to believe in men. You have always held me up. You are the only man who

has never failed me. I am not speaking merely of business, John—you understand, don't you?"

The other fumbled over the papers which he held in his hands. "It is like you to forget the circumstances under which we met—I—it was just such a night as this"—His voice broke and he went quickly to a table where he spread out his papers and bent over them as if seeking a particular sheet. In reality he was trying to hide his deep emotion. When he spoke again his voice was steady. "I think I have everything you wanted me to get."

Dan, with an effort, returned in a matter-of-fact tone, "All right, John, we'll go over what you have there presently. But first, if you don't mind, there are some things I wish to say. Before we go any farther I must be dead sure that you understand exactly what it is that I want to do, and why."

Big Dan dropped into the chair before his desk and Saxton, seating himself, waited while his employer seemed to be arranging his thoughts.

Slowly, with long pauses at the end of every sentence, as if speaking more to himself than to the man who listened so intently, Dan began: "It was just twenty years ago this month that I decided to develop the mine in old Dewey Bald Mountain. We took out the first ore three months later. Father and mother owned Dewey Bald long before I was born. They knew that enormous deposit of mineral was there. It wasn't a guess, they could see it—thousands of tons—in the big cave where the Old Shepherd's son died. But they would never touch it for themselves.

"Father and mother had received from the Old Shepherd, my namesake, some ideas of life and Christianity that were

different from the ideas of established church members generally. Born and raised as I was, it was natural, I suppose, that I should feel called to the ministry, but there were no churches in that section of the Ozarks in my boyhood days. The only Christianity I knew was the Christianity of the Old Shepherd of the hills—the Christianity of my father and mother. All my life, up to the time I entered college, mother was my only teacher.

“But in that denominational college I was taught, of course, the history and doctrines of the denomination with which I became identified. Then when I took up my work as pastor of the Memorial Church at Corinth I found that the church in actual operation was quite a different thing from the simple Christianity of my backwoods home and the theoretical church of the college and seminary. It is no wonder that Judge Strong and the others drove me from the ministry. I was a down-and-out failure.” There was a note in Big Dan’s voice which told how deep had been the hurt of that experience.

Saxton made as if to speak, but the other motioned him to wait.

“But, you see, I still had father and mother and Hope, and with them to help I simply couldn’t let go of Christianity. And so, believing as I did that all work which truly serves humanity is God’s work, and that a man’s ministry is whatever he can do best for the best life of his fellow men, I entered what Hope calls the Ministry of Business. I undertook the development of the Dewey Bald Mine with the idea of making it my contribution to the welfare of my generation. I know to-night, John, that as I failed in my Ministry of Preaching I have, so far, failed in my Ministry of

Business. I don't mean that I have failed in *business*," he added with an odd smile, "I mean that I have failed to make my business a ministry; I have failed to accomplish in any large way the purpose of all Christian business, as I understand it."

Again, for a few silent moments, Big Dan seemed to be arranging his thoughts. When he spoke this time it was with the solemn earnestness of one laying bare the deepest convictions of his soul. "I tell you, John Saxton, if the business men of America do not somehow get a little Christian religion into the business of our country, and if the citizens of this nation do not get a little Christianity into their citizenship and into their everyday affairs, national destruction is inevitable. Since our survey of the political, economic and social conditions throughout the country was completed last month I have been making a careful study of the material gathered by our workers. The facts and figures submitted by these unprejudiced observers would convince any sane person that the United States of America is moving toward utter ruin. Unless this destructive trend of our national life is radically altered we will simply go to pieces. And the only force which can combat our present ruinous course is the religion of Jesus.

"Our survey shows that the annual cost of crime in the United States is over two and one half times the total ordinary income of our nation and over three times the national budget.

"The number of prisoners in our penal institutions has increased in seventeen years from one hundred and six-tenths prisoners for every one hundred thousand of our population, to one hundred and fifty out of every one hundred thousand.

“In the last twenty-four years the crime of murder has increased from two and one-tenth per one hundred thousand to eight and five-tenths per one hundred thousand.

“Throughout the whole country the percentage of illegitimate births has steadily risen, while the number of very young mothers is rapidly increasing. The great majority of mothers of illegitimate children are under twenty-one years of age. In 1920 the age of greatest frequency was twenty years, but in 1924 it stood at eighteen, with an alarming number at the ages of seventeen and sixteen. Children, John! The generation that is just coming into the motherhood and fatherhood of the nation!

“Approximately half the convicts in our penitentiaries are under twenty-five, and eight out of ten are under thirty. It is estimated that eighty per cent of all crimes are committed by boys. Children, John, the generation that is just coming into the responsibilities of citizenship!

“With all this there is an astounding increase in degeneracy with all the horrors which that term, rightly understood, implies.”

Turning to his desk Big Dan took up a book. “This is Frederick Pierce’s *Mobilizing the Mid-Brain*. Listen to what he says of certain conditions which are inseparable from our national situation as a whole:

“ ‘In about seventy years from now, that is to say, within the lifetime of some of us and within the lifetime of almost all our children, unless the rate of increase of insanity and disabling neurosis in America is radically checked, it will be intolerable for those who remain in health to support the burden of those who are mentally or nervously ill. To make sure that we do not allow ourselves to escape the force of this

fact let us consider the utterances of two alienists within the last year, reporting from widely separated sections of the country. Their published statements agree on the following point—that at the present rate of increase in insanity in the United States and Canada, the last sane person will have disappeared from the major portion of North America in two hundred years from this date. In a third of that time the burden of taxation to maintain the necessary institutions and sanitariums would become tremendous. Moreover, the average breeding strain of our grandchildren will be so impaired and deteriorated that the normal expectation in every family of father, mother and three children, will be at least two wholly or partially disabled by mental or nervous disease.’

“In a footnote, he says:

“ ‘The figures are not taken merely from the period affected by the recent War, but go back through thirty years. For example, the six-year period of 1904-1910 shows increases, sectionally, of twenty-one per cent to forty per cent in enumerated hospital cases of insanity throughout the United States.’

“Dr. Pierce rightly adds: ‘The effect of this condition upon the chances of our nation being able to survive politically or economically, I leave to the reader’s imagination.’

“ ‘Read the figures as we may, there is no possible escape from their meaning. We have the choice of facing the issue and taking the necessary measures to correct the situation or of letting our children and grandchildren face it when it will probably be too late. Compared to the impending menace of this situation, such calamities as the recent War, with its

welter of slaughter and aftermath of ruin, appear as mere ripples in the stream of human history.’

“Dr. Pierce makes no observation, here, John, as to the relation of morals to mental and nervous health. That there is a very close relationship I think no one of average intelligence will deny. Mental and nervous diseases are fruits of immorality, and immorality roots in irreligion. Only by re-establishing the people’s sense of God can our nation regain its moral, mental, and physical health and insure the future of the race.

“To show that I am neither an unbalanced pessimist nor a religious fanatic, and that I am not alone in my conclusions—do you remember the opening paragraph of that resolution which was passed by eight hundred business men at the luncheon of the Industrial Relations Committee of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce in 1922?

“*‘As Americans, we recognize that we face a crucial condition in our social, political and industrial life, which, if not corrected, can lead only to individual and national disaster.’*

“And Ernest T. Trigg in his address on that same occasion said:

“*‘There must be brought back into the situation a recognition of God and His divine guidance.’*

“These eight hundred leading industrialists of the country are not wild-eyed alarmists, John. Mr. Trigg is not a religious fanatic. These men represent the best business intelligence of this nation and this is their sane and solemn opinion as to the industrial situation and its needs.

“You know what the National Economic League is. It is not too much to say that a list of members of the National

Council of the League would be practically a list of the biggest brains in America—every leading thinker in the country, almost—and they represent every field of our country’s interests: the Press, Law, Education, Government, Commerce, Labor. Well, the Council recently indicated the paramount problems of the United States by a preferential vote. The list of fifty-five subjects gives the comparative importance of these subjects as shown by the votes of eighteen thousand one hundred and seventy-six members of the Council. Now, if the votes had been equally distributed each subject would have received, in round numbers, three hundred and thirty votes. But, John, *three* subjects out of the fifty-five received *three thousand and seventy-seven votes*. These three problems are: Lawlessness, Respect for Law, Administration of Justice; Ethical, Moral and Religious Training. They are all embraced in one word RELIGION. Certainly no one would say that these eighteen thousand one hundred and seventy-six members of the Council of the National Economic League are unbalanced pessimists or religious cranks.

“You and I understand why these leading thinkers of our country consider these three problems of such relatively great importance to the nation. The most feeble-minded man or woman in the land ought to be able to grasp the fact that without respect for law; without justice; without moral and religious training, our nation cannot endure.

“I have failed in my Ministry of Business, John, because I have failed to make any real contribution to our one great national need, the need of Christian religion.”

Big Dan was tremendously in earnest. As if half ashamed of his display of feeling he rose from his chair and turning

away from his companion went again to the window where he stood looking down over the city which now lay under the full fury of the storm.

“I should think,” said Saxton slowly, “that you would be the last man in the world to feel that you had failed in your Ministry of Business. As your confidential agent I know, better than any person living, the enormous sums of money you have given to all sorts of charity—to schools and hospitals and every kind of benevolent work—and to individuals as well. Haven’t you, from the beginning, held the wealth of your mine as a trust to be administered by you?”

Big Dan answered with almost a touch of impatience:

“I have failed just the same.”

“But how have you failed, when your work has been a Christian work?”

“I have failed because the one great need of the world is not the need of Christian *work*. As I have just said, it is the need of Christian religion.

“Why, John, the amount of money given to good works—I mean outside of churches—to charity, to schools and education, is enormous. If you look up the statistics you will find that in the last few years there has been, in the United States, an amazing development of interest in social-welfare work and in charities and benevolences of every kind. But it is of profound significance that as the public interest in good works has increased the religious spirit of the people has declined. Never in the history of mankind has so much been given to what we call good works—works I mean that are essentially Christian. And never in our own country, at least,

have the people been so irreligious. And this collapse of Christianity has brought us to the verge of an appalling moral bankruptcy.

“I know, John, that we give also something over seven hundred million dollars annually to religion; but wait, I have a letter—here it is. After mother’s death I found this among the things which she had treasured. It was written by the Old Shepherd, who was her only teacher, to his friend Dr. Coughlan. At the time of Dad Howitt’s death Dr. Coughlan gave this letter to mother. I have read it so many times that I know it by heart.

“ ‘We build temples and churches but will not worship in them; we hire spiritual advisers but refuse to heed them; we buy Bibles but will not read them; believing in God we do not fear Him; acknowledging Christ we neither follow nor obey Him.’ ”

As Big Dan was putting the Old Shepherd’s letter reverently away in his desk, Saxton said: “But I thought you were such a firm believer in the religion of good works.”

“And I am,” returned Dan, quickly, “but I have come to understand that while good works are the fruits of the Christian religion, they are no more Christianity itself than a barrel of apples is a tree.

“Our fathers worshiped God. Christianity grew from that worship as a tree grows from its roots, until in our generation it is bearing its legitimate fruit—good works. Can any one question that the marvelous growth of interest in charities and social-welfare work of every kind in this generation is the direct result of the Christianity of our fathers? But while we to-day are harvesting these fruits of Christianity, like the miserable farmers of life that we are, we are neglecting the

tree which produces them. With no thought of the future we are permitting the roots of our religion to die for want of intelligent cultivation.

“Our great need in this generation is to see our good works not as religion but as the fruit of religion—to understand that the fruit is not the tree—that the tree is Christianity, and the root of the tree is the worship of God as He is revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus, in the teaching of all other great spiritual leaders, in the wonders and beauty of nature and, indeed, in all the miracles of life and the universe. If this generation neglects to cultivate the tree there will be no fruit for the generations that are to come.

“Religiously, John, we are a race of spiritual grocerymen. We traffic in the produce upon which the very life of our nation depends without a thought of the gardens and orchards which supply the stuff we buy and sell or a single care for the condition under which this food of the race is produced. To save America we must do more than deal in good works. To save America we must worship God.”

John Saxton said slowly, “I think I understand, but just what do you mean by the worship of God?”

“I mean the recognition of God—the feeling of God—the acknowledgment of God. The groceryman, for example, must feel God in the produce which he buys and sells. He must be conscious of God as he is conscious of money. He accepts money as a vital element in his business; he must accept God as a vital element in his life. He looks upon a grocery store as a necessity in the community; he must look upon religion as a necessity in the nation. The groceryman, in his business dealings, recognizes his dependence upon the farmer from whom he buys. He must go a step farther and habitually

acknowledge to himself that without God manifested in nature there would be no food with which to feed the people—that without God the combined strength and skill of all the agriculturists of the world could not produce so much as a single grain of wheat. Our modern civilization does not recognize God—it only uses Him.”

“But do you mean to say that religious work—I do not mean distinctively church work, I mean any good work, Christian work—do you mean to say that such work is not a recognition of God, is not in fact worship?”

“It might be—it should be. If it were so conceived and so understood it would be. But only in exceptional cases is it so conceived, and certainly, by the people in general, it is not so understood. These enormous sums of money that are given annually to charity and social-welfare work, and to schools and education—are these gifts ever thought of definitely as offerings to God—as acts of worship? Would any one contend that the purpose of these good works is to bring the people to a recognition of God? The millions devoted to scientific research, the millions bestowed upon higher educational institutions—is the idea or spirit of worship in these great endowments and foundations? As for our civic charity organizations and that class of good works, they are merely business policies and are so presented to the people. These vast fortunes that are given to good works are not even given in the name of Christianity, but in the names of individuals and cities and various organizations!

“But, John, listen, *the majority of the people who give these millions to humanity are Christians, and they are intelligent, thinking Christians.* They see the disaster which menaces our country. They know that the only thing that can

save America is religion. Why, then, do they not give millions to religion? I'll tell you why: It is because *in this so-called Christian country there is no organization in existence through which one can spend a dollar for a purely religious purpose.*"

"And that," Big Dan continued, "is my problem.

"When father and mother turned Dewey Bald Mountain over to me they expected me, in their simple Christian way, to use it religiously. From the first I have honestly desired to fulfill the trust. I have talked it all out with Hope and with the boys. Neither Hope nor I have any wish to leave a great fortune to the children. They have not been taught to expect it. She is with me heart and soul in what I propose to do. So are the boys. We haven't said anything to Grace yet because she is a little too young, and we don't like to disturb her just now with such questions. But the girl is too much like her mother, John, for us to have any doubts as to where she will stand.

"As I have told you, I am convinced that our country, because of its rapidly increasing wealth, together with the amazing growth of popular lawlessness, immorality, insane extravagance and cynical irreligion, is fast approaching a state of general anarchy, social degeneracy and political rottenness which can only result in our national downfall. I solemnly believe that the only thing which can save America is for us, somehow, to reestablish through worship the people's sense of God.

"They call me 'The Rockefeller of the lead and zinc industry—the Carnegie of mining,' and all that. You and I know, of course, that I am a long way yet from the

Rockefeller-Carnegie class, but we know also that I am rated at several millions. John, I want to devote the millions I have taken from the Dewey Bald Mine to what I believe to be the one great vital need of the world to-day. I want, in a word, to give these millions to religion as other men have given millions to science and art and welfare-work and education. But, John, I don't know how to do it."

"You are a church man," said Saxton significantly. "It was as a church man that you—" he hesitated, "that you came into my life."

"Yes," said Big Dan.

Saxton continued: "During the fifteen years that I have known you, you have been an active member of the Old Commons Church, and you have given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the local work and to the missions and schools of your denomination. Don't you call that giving to religion?"

"I am a member of a church, John, and have contributed to its various denominational enterprises because it is the only organization I know which makes even a pretense of standing for and promoting the Christian religion. It is the only thing in sight. But we must face the fact that the Church of to-day is utterly unable to meet this national crisis of immorality and lawlessness which is the direct result of the irreligious spirit of the people.

"There must be a reason for this failure of the Church," he continued. "Are we to believe that Christianity is less potent for righteousness to-day than it was in the days of our fathers? Or has the Church been rendered impotent through the dissipations of its energies in meeting the demands of

innumerable activities which are not purely Christian? One thing is clear: We must either doubt the power of the Christian religion as a vital force in the life of the people or we must question the policies and methods of the Church.

“You and I are Christians, John—members of the same church. Which shall we do? Question the divine religion of Jesus or question the human efficiency of this institution which exists for the sole purpose of making Christianity a vital factor in the lives of men?”

“There can be only one answer to that,” returned Saxton. “Between the teaching of Jesus and the wisdom of His human agents whose business it is to present Christianity to the world there can be no comparison.”

“Well, then,” said Big Dan, “suppose we, as business men, look into these human policies of the Church. It seems to me that the cause of this disastrous loss of efficiency is fairly obvious. I have realized for several years—as I believe the great majority of thinking church members realize—that a comparatively small portion of the enormous sum of money annually contributed to our churches is used for a purely religious purpose.

“The Bureau of the Census in 1916 lists one hundred and eighty-three different Christian denominations. Denominations are multiplied by dividing denominations into denominations. Think of it! One hundred and eighty-three separate and distinct Christian organizations to be maintained in the name of one Christ, for the sole purpose of teaching one Christianity!”

Saxton said thoughtfully: “I doubt if many people, to-day, believe that it makes any real difference as to which church one belongs.”

“Exactly,” returned Dan, “and that more than anything else perhaps proves the weakness of the denominational system. If the churches had not lost their grip upon their own members, even, it would make a tremendous difference as to which church one belonged. You are right, John, in the minds of the people it makes no difference. And, yet, the fact remains that it is impossible to give a dollar to any church and not support this denominationalism.

“The strength, energy and interest of the people, in these modern times, is most adequately represented in terms of money. Dollars stand for human power. Well, four-fifths, at least, of all the money contributed to the cause of Christian religion goes to maintain these denominational differences which we are told are of no importance. When, led by the religious desire of his heart to see the truths of Jesus’ teaching made effective among men, a church member gives five dollars to his church, what happens? Four dollars out of that five are spent to maintain whatever it is that makes his denomination different from the one hundred and eighty-two other denominations, each of which is actively engaged in spending four out of every five dollars which it receives to maintain *its* distinguishing features. And yet we are asked to believe that these one hundred and eighty-three churches are all one in Christ and are all united in preaching one Christianity. Mathematically, the oneness of the churches is one to four in that they spend one dollar for the thing upon which they agree and four dollars for the things upon which they differ.

“Does such a state of affairs, in fact, make no difference to the people, John? Is it any wonder that the central idea of Christianity is lost—that the spirit of worship is lost—that

religion has become a subject for our humorous magazines, our jokesmiths, cartoonists and funny papers? The wonder is that any one retains membership in a church. No one would, except, as I say, they want to do *something* and the Church is the only thing they know.”

“But is there not a strong tendency among certain denominations to unite?” Saxton asked.

Big Dan answered: “In the years between 1906 and 1916—the last available figures—nine denominations consolidated with other bodies. In the same period twenty-two new denominations came into existence. It is true that there is something like an agreement between a few of the denominations as to a division of territory. In many communities churches have so multiplied that there are actually not enough people to maintain them all. But this agreement on the division of such territories is not primarily in the interest of Christianity; it is clearly an effort of the denominations to save themselves. Competition has simply reached a point where it is disastrous to all so they are uniting to maintain their differences.”

Saxton smiled. “And yet you say the world has never before known such good works and that these good works are the fruits of the Christianity of our fathers. Well, our fathers worshiped God in denominational churches.”

“Yes,” replied Big Dan, “but the denominationalism of our fathers was born of their religious spirit. To-day, denominationalism is not the expression of a Christian spirit, but quite the contrary. To our fathers, the choice of a church was wholly a matter of religious conviction. To-day one joins this, that or the other church as one chooses a social club or a political order—the motive governing the choice is

convenience, social, political or business policy, friendship or family. In our fathers' time a Christian character was necessary to membership in any church. To-day, under the competitive system of denominational churches, character is no longer a test of fellowship. If it were, the churches could not pay their running expenses. Denominationalism in the past stood in the minds of the people for Christianity. To-day the people think of Christianity—when they think of it at all—as something apart from denominationalism; and this is just as true of church members as it is of those who are not identified with any church.”

Big Dan arose suddenly and went again to the window where he stood silently looking out into the night and the storm. For some time he stood there as if lost in contemplation of the scene. Then, still looking down upon the city, he spoke: “John, how many churches have we here in Kansas City?”

“You mean denominations?”

“Yes.”

“I suppose we have most of them—there must be at least a hundred.”

“They all say that Christ is coming again, do they not?”

“Practically all teach the coming of Christ, yes.”

“Well, John, if Jesus had actually come in those clouds to-night, to which church would He call His followers? From which pulpit would He issue His divine proclamations? In the light of what you know of churches, would that particular church selected by Jesus rejoice that the Lord had come again to the world or would they not rather more rejoice that He had come to them and not to one of their rival denominations? In the rejoicing of the other ninety-nine

would there be any note of regret that they must go to a rival denomination to meet their Lord? Would it be inconsistent with modern church methods if the pastor of the honored church were to rush to the newspapers with an announcement to the effect that his peculiar denominational doctrines were vindicated because among all the churches Jesus had come to them—that if the people wished to hear the Messiah they must assemble at his particular place of worship? Would any down-to-date minister overlook such an opportunity, do you think? John, if you will tell me to which church Jesus would come I will give all I have to that church.”

John Saxton’s voice betrayed the depth of his emotions as he answered: “You are right—there is no organization existing to-day through which one could spend a dollar for a purely religious purpose. And yet, no one—least of all the Christian ministry, I think—questions the desperate need of a great religious awakening. God only can save this country from the disastrous chaos toward which we are moving. But God has always worked through human agencies. God makes the wheat but the farmer must cultivate and harvest it, the miller grind it and your groceryman distribute the flour. We cannot doubt that God will do His part in supplying our need of religion. But what about the human agency? Where are we to look for our groceryman?”

“We will look to the Church, John.”

“To the Church! But haven’t you just been saying—”

Big Dan smiled. “I have been speaking of the one hundred and eighty-three different conflicting denominational organizations. I have said nothing of the great multitude of sincerely religious church members who are to be found in

every denomination. If there were not in every church individual members who are far more Christian than the organization which they support the situation would be hopeless. These Christian church members, when the time comes, will rise superior to the worn-out machinery of their ancient denominational creeds and reestablish their touch with God.

“Most Christian thinkers and many who make no profession of Christianity are saying that right now we are on the verge of the greatest religious revival known to history. The very fact that the nation is breaking down spiritually and morally predicates this revival of religion exactly as a man’s hunger predicts that he will eat when food is placed before him. On every hand there is abundant evidence to show that there is already a widespread awakening interest. For instance, you can scarcely turn the pages of any one of our great popular magazines without coming upon an article on religion, or of a religious trend. Ten years ago no editor of such a publication would have dared give space to any one of these articles that are appearing now by hundreds. The sales of books on religion compared with the sales of even five years ago have increased enormously. Since the War, the people have been thinking and talking of religion with a freedom they, perhaps, have never before known. That this freedom is expressed so commonly in a spirit of contempt for existing religious forms no less clearly indicates the interest.

“And the most significant feature of this increasing popular interest in religion is that it is not of the Church. To an amazing degree it is independent of the Church. These great popular magazines are not church publications. The writers of these articles are not strictly religious writers. The

publishers of these books are not denominational publishing houses that specialize in religious literature. Nor is this awakening interest turning *toward* the Church. In my opinion it is very clearly a turning *away* from the Church. The great body of Christian church members who see in business, in national government, in civic affairs, in courts of justice, and in our social life, the almost universal lack of honor and honesty, of respect for law, of right moral sense, and common decency—these Christian church members, I say, are not looking to their churches to remedy the situation. They are still aboard the old religious ship, yes, but they know that the ship is sinking. They recognize that their church ship has been in its day a safe and seaworthy craft and they love it for its honorable record—for its memories and associations, but they sadly recognize that the time has come when they must look elsewhere for a vessel adequate to these present-day religious needs.”

For some minutes the two men, in that quiet room which was so charged with the feeling of great financial wealth and power, were silent. Each was absorbed in his own thoughts. Over the city the storm raged.

“Come,” said Big Dan at last, “we must get down to our work. You have your reports ready, you say?”

John Saxton turned to the table and took up the sheaf of papers. For an hour or more they bent over columns of figures and tabulated statistics. Then Big Dan pushed back in his chair with a smile of satisfaction. “Very good, John,” he said heartily. “Now for the place—you have located the city?”

Saxton unfolded a map and spread it on the table. "I have found that towns of less than twenty thousand population in general are not adequately representative. I have eliminated cities of over one hundred thousand for the same reason. In towns of the less-than-twenty-thousand class the rural element is too large. The great cities are too far removed from the country class; they are a world in themselves. By the census of 1920, there are in the United States two hundred and eighty-seven cities with a population of from twenty thousand to one hundred thousand. The average population of these cities is forty thousand six hundred and ninety-eight. A city of this size, if located in the most American section of the country, would, I believe, in every phase of its political, social, business, civic and religious life, most fairly represent the American people."

"You have such a place in mind?" asked Dan.

Saxton indicated a point on the map. "The city of Westover."

Big Dan rose to his feet and placing his hands on the shoulder of his confidential agent said quietly: "You understand perfectly what you have to do, John?"

The man's dark eyes met his employer's gaze with a steady strength. "Perfectly."

"When will you start?"

"In the morning."

"Good! When you have something to report I will see you again—until then—"

"Until then," echoed John Saxton, gravely.

Big Dan looked at his watch. "My car is waiting. I'll drop you at your hotel."

The outer offices were deserted. Uncle Zac had long since finished his work and departed.

“By the way,” said Big Dan as they stepped into the night elevator, “I know some people in Westover.”

CHAPTER III

THE GROCERYMAN

JOE PADDOCK sat in the little office of his grocery store. The office was a tiny box-stall-like arrangement separated from the store proper by partitions of varnished Georgia pine and window glass. The woodwork was very shiny; the glass not too clean. The groceryman was seated in a golden oak chair at a golden oak desk. The top of the desk was protected by a large square of gray blotting paper stamped with the large black-lettered advertisement of an insurance company.

It was half past one; a slack hour in the grocery business. On the insurance company's advertisement over which the groceryman's head was bent industriously were neatly arranged stacks of silver dollars, quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies, a pile of paper money and another of checks. The groceryman was making up the cash to go to the bank. Evidently the morning trade had been good. Writing in the total on the deposit slip Joe dumped the coins and stuffed the bills and checks into a canvas sack and pushed back his chair. Presently he would walk down the street two blocks to the First National Bank on the corner of State and Washington.

In his general appearance, Joe Paddock was comfortable. His age was the comfortable age of, say forty-five. He was neither large and imposing nor small and insignificant—just average, with an average face of ordinary kindly intelligence. In short, the groceryman's countenance would have reminded one of those composite photographs which one sees in

textbooks or magazine articles on physiognomy. But the groceryman's face, at the completion of his task, which by all the rules of the game should have been a most satisfying task, did not express satisfaction. With his well kept, well clothed body resting comfortably in his golden oak office chair and the prosperously filled canvas sack at his elbow he still gave the impression of one under the shadow of gloomy thoughts.

And Joe, himself, was conscious of this gloom. He felt it as distinctly as one feels the hush that comes before a storm. He was not expecting a storm of any sort. His life, so far as he could see, was all fair weather with no clouds even on the most distant horizon. Yet, with apparently no reason at all, he was feeling, as he would have said, "glum." Without any apparent cause, he was burdened with a sense of something wrong—a feeling of impending trouble.

For nearly twenty years now the groceryman had "made up the cash" at half past one and had walked to the bank. Joe was a director in the First National. The First National was as sound as old wheat. His business was as sound as the bank. Whatever the cause of his low spirits it was certainly not financial troubles. The only financial trouble the groceryman knew was the universal trouble of not having enough. As for that, Joe Paddock often reflected that *he* had all *he* wanted, and always he added, "for myself."

A clerk presented himself listlessly. "Mr. Paddock," he whined, "that Carlton woman wants us to charge another order—five dollars and thirty cents—says her old man is working again now and will pay week from Saturday. What'll I do?"

The groceryman did not look up.

The clerk raised his voice with a complaining note as if protesting at the unnecessary labor of repeating his question. “Mr. Paddock, that Carlton woman—”

“Heh—Oh, excuse me, Bill—sure—all right—give her what she wants.”

The cleric turned wearily away.

“What in thunder is the matter with me?” mused Joe uneasily.

Grasping the canvas sack as he rose, he stepped to the door of his office. In the doorway he paused and from long habit looked over the store. It was not a large store—just an ordinary, commonplace, well established grocery. Shelves behind the counters from floor to ceiling, filled with brightly labeled canned goods, packages of breakfast foods, boxes of pepper and spices, bottles of olives and pickles, jars of preserves. Show cases filled with candies, cigars and trinkets. A big red coffee mill, a cheese under a screen cover, a glass-doored cupboard for bread and cookies, a golden oak refrigerator. Crates of vegetables, apples, oranges, lemons, a hanging bunch of bananas. Stacks of flour in sacks, barrels and boxes. A mixed odor of everything edible flavored with every known spice, tea and coffee, coal oil, molasses and gasoline. That odor was as familiar and uninspiring to Joe Paddock as the smell of hay to a farmer, the tang of the sea to a sailor or the odor of a stable to a hostler.

Joe Paddock had no great absorbing interest in his grocery. It was a good business, as good as any other, better than some. He had become a groceryman for no particular reason; it had seemed a good thing. He accepted it as he accepted the other commonplaces of life such as family cares, taxes, politics, schools, religion. As his eye, directed by habit, took

in this familiar scene of his everyday life he noticed the delivery boy, Davie Bates, staggering under a basket of groceries toward the rear door where a Ford delivery car was waiting. Davie was a pale-faced, thin-shouldered, weak-limbed lad, sadly underfed and pitifully overworked. The groceryman's kindly thought was that Davie really ought not to lift such a heavy load. But confound it, the boy was late. He should have been started with his first afternoon delivery a good hour ago. Joe Paddock and Davie's mother had been sweethearts in their boy and girl days. Then Joe had married Laura Louise Fields and become a groceryman and Mary had married a young carpenter, Dave Bates. "Darn those clerks—worthless, triflin' lot—can't keep their minds on their work a minute! Bill, there, 's gassin' with that Susie Brown, flapper; Tom and Hank, they're visitin' with each other and three customers waiting!" He walked toward the front of the store and the clerks became attentive. When he reached the sidewalk he paused again and stood looking up and down the street. He seemed to be waiting for some one, or something. But he was not. He was merely standing there. And the groceryman, himself, curiously enough, had the feeling of waiting for some one or something.

Charlie Bannock, the druggist, on the southeast corner of the block, stopped. "Hello, Joe, goin' to the bank?"

"Hello, Charlie. Yep."

"I've just been. How's business, Joe?"

The groceryman answered with listless indifference: "Business? Oh, business is all right." Then, as if his dulled interest had suddenly kindled he repeated with a show of enthusiasm: "Business is fine, Charlie, *fine*." The final word

flamed out right heartily and in the glow of it he was able to ask with spirit: "How is it with you, Charlie?"

"Never seen it so good. Tell you, Joe, we're goin' to be a big town some day. Hear about the building permits? Increase already one hundred per cent over last year. Banks all show big increase in deposits, too. So long—must be gettin' back on the job."

"So long, Charlie."

The groceryman felt the flame of the moment flickering, dying. Already the chill of his unwarranted gloom was upon him. He looked carefully up and down the street. There was nothing wrong anywhere. State Street was a good street, best in town for the grocery store. Even at this hour of the day it was a scene of hustling activity, with clatter and rattle and roar enough to fully justify the druggist's optimism. The groceryman's nearest neighbor, Jim Hadley, came out to stand in front of his store—gent's furnishings—and Joe moved a few slow steps to the side of his brother merchant.

"Hello, Jim."

"Hello, Joe. How's business?"

"Business? Oh, business is all right—fine, Jim—business is *fine*! How's yours?"

"Great, Joe. Last month biggest month I ever had. Hear about the building permits? One hundred per cent increase. Bank deposits coming up all the time, too. Lots of strangers in town. All Westover needs now is some big capital—big factories, mills or automobile works or something. Missed you at the Booster's Club luncheon to-day, Joe. What's matter? You know our motto: 'Keep a-pushin'!' Got everythin' goin' our way now if we only just keep a-pushin'! Remember them two frogs that fell into the can of milk? One

of 'em says 'It's no use' and sank to the bottom and drowned. T'other just kept a kickin' and kicked out a chunk of butter big enough to float around on till the farmer let him out in the mornin'." He slapped Joe on the back and laughed as heartily as though he had not told that old story a thousand and one times before.

At the corner, as the groceryman waited for an opening in the stream of traffic, a big, shiny car with a liveried chauffeur at the wheel and an imposing personage in the rear seat passed. The personage, seeing the groceryman, smiled and bowed. Joe returned the salutation in his best manner. Mrs. Jamison was his wealthiest customer. The Jamisons had a wine cellar—all pre-war stuff—so Joe had heard. Mrs. Jamison went every season to New York for grand opera. Joe's wife always called his attention to the news in the *Morning Herald* and in the *Evening Star*. Mrs. Jamison, it was generally understood, always ran over to Paris for her gowns. Mrs. Jamison never wore a dress, she always wore a gown. As her shining car was chauffeured proudly on down the street, Mrs. Jamison was thinking: "What an utterly commonplace man—good man, though, no doubt of that—real backbone-of-the-country class. And what a commonplace business, a groceryman, ugh!" Mrs. Jamison's husband was a promoter of almost anything that could be promoted.

The glow of being recognized by Mrs. Jamison lasted Joe Paddock almost until he reached the First National Bank.

There were long queues of customers waiting their turns at the different windows. After all, to be a director of the First National of Westover was something. The groceryman really did not need to wait in the line at his window but he liked it.

He liked the nods and smiles of greeting. He fancied they were thinking: “Joe Paddock is a director here,” and it gave him a sense of importance which he never enjoyed in his store—nor, for that matter, anywhere else.

It was his turn at the window. As he plumped the canvas sack down on the marble slab he greeted the teller with a cheerful “Hello, Frank.”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Paddock.” (The groceryman was a director.) “How are you to-day?”

“Me? Oh, I’m all right—’bout as usual.”

“Business pretty good?”

“Business? Oh, yes, business is good.” He was watching the teller sort and stack the coins. “Business is very good, Frank—*fine*.”

As the groceryman, with his empty sack, turned from the window the teller glanced after him curiously.

The president’s desk was at the far end of the room just inside the low wall of polished marble which separated the First National officials from the outer world. The open-and-above-board effect of this arrangement was supposed to engender a feeling of confidence in the financial heart of the public while at the same time the marble wall prevented the customers from intruding too far into the financial heart of the institution. The president beckoned to Joe and the groceryman went to lean on the marble wall with two of the bank’s largest depositors, Ed Jones, real estate, and Mike Donovan, general contractor.

Before the others could speak, Jones, who always spoke first in any company, greeted the groceryman with: “What’s

the matter with you, Joe, you missed the Rotary Club again this week?”

“Couldn’t help it, Ed,” Joe answered with a feeble grin. “I was out of town, at the farm.” He forced himself to meet the quizzical humor of Mike Donovan’s keen Irish eyes. “How are you, Mike?”

The contractor’s heavy voice rumbled up from the depths of his broad chest: “Purty good, Joe, purty good. I guess I’m gettin’ *mine* all right.”

The banker, the groceryman and the real estate man laughed.

As Donovan and Jones moved on the bank president murmured admiringly: “You bet your life, Mike is getting his.” Then, with a friendly interest which was genuine and a smile of honest affection, he said: “Well, Joe, how are you anyway?”

The groceryman tried to smile. “Oh, I’m all right, I guess, Henry.”

Joe Paddock and Henry Winton were born on neighboring farms. They had attended the same country school, fished and swum together in Mill Creek, hunted in the same woods, skated in winter and picnicked in summer with the same crowd. Together they had attended the State University at Westover and were graduated in the same class.

Banker Winton was shrewdly studying his old friend’s face. “What’s the matter with you, Joe? You don’t act like yourself lately. What’s the trouble, old man?”

The groceryman moved uneasily. “Oh, I don’t know, Henry. Nothin’, I guess, just feelin’ sort o’ grouchy.”

Winton was sympathetic. “Liver out of order? Kidneys, maybe, when a man gets along our age, you know, Joe.”

“Aw, there’s nothing the matter with me physically. Doc Gordon says I’m sound as a nut—eat anything I want—sleep like a top—no ache nor pain nor anything. It’s nothing like *that*. How are *you*, Henry?”

The banker’s face seemed suddenly to reflect his friend’s troubled spirit. It was almost as if he had, for a moment, dropped a mask. “To tell the truth,” he lowered his voice to a confidential pitch, “I’ve been feeling a little below par myself. I’m just like you, don’t know what it is—it’s not business—business couldn’t be better. We’re going to show darned near fifty per cent increase over this month last year, Joe. Your business all right, isn’t it?”

“Business—oh, yes, business is good—fine, Henry—*fine!*”

They were silent for a moment as if they had unintentionally reached the end of the conversation.

Then the groceryman, with a painful attempt at casual cheerfulness, asked: “How’s Mary these days? Haven’t seen her for a coon’s age. Laura and I were talking about it last night.”

The banker lowered his eyes and turned his face a little to one side. “Mary’s all right, Joe,” he answered slowly, “that is, she would be if it wasn’t for—well, she worries a lot—*you* know. How is Laura?”

“She’s well—’bout as usual,” the groceryman answered gravely.

“No need to ask about Georgia,” said Winton, trying to smile, “she was in here this morning.” Georgia was Joe Paddock’s daughter.

The groceryman did not answer, neither did he smile. Then, lowering his voice and speaking as if the question had been in his mind all the time, he asked: "How *is* Harry doing lately, Henry?"

The banker again turned his face away and slowly shook his head. Harry was Henry Winton's son.

A brisk but suave voice broke the spell. The banker caught up his mask. The groceryman, who was leaning over the marble wall, jerked himself erect. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. How do you do, Mr. Winton? How are you, Mr. Paddock?" It was George Oskins, proprietor of the Palace Hotel.

"Hello, Oskins," returned Winton.

"How do you do, Mr. Oskins?" said Paddock.

It will be noted that the hotel man addressed the banker as *Mr.* Winton while the banker called him simply Oskins, which may be understood fairly to indicate their business relationship. The hotel man saying *Mr.* Paddock and the groceryman returning with *Mr.* Oskins shows as clearly that the supplies for the Palace were purchased wholesale in Kansas City.

"Didn't see you at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon Tuesday, Mr. Paddock," said Oskins in a tone of "My dear sir, how can you expect Westover to progress without your honored presence at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon?"

"No, I missed it," replied the groceryman dryly.

Henry Winton asked briskly: "How is the hotel business, Oskins?"

The proprietor of the Palace was eagerly and anxiously enthusiastic. "Wonderful, Mr. Winton. Every room in the

house full. Had to turn down twenty reservations last week. By the way," he put his soft pudgy hand on the groceryman's arm to draw him closer and, leaning confidentially over the marble wall, spoke in a hushed tone, "we have a guest at the hotel that you gentlemen really ought to meet. Wonderful man! All kinds of money, I should say, or at least represents mighty big interests—impresses you that way. He's here for some time—wouldn't say how long—monthly rates—wonderfully interested in Westover. Just the kind of big business man we need. I recommended the First National."

"What's his name?" asked the banker.

"Saxton, John Saxton, registered from Kansas City."

"Saxton—Saxton—" the banker repeated thoughtfully.

"Name sounds familiar. Ever hear of him, Joe?"

"Saxton?" The groceryman shook his head. "Don't recall that I have."

"He's somebody big all right," said Oskins. "The kind that you just naturally give the best room in the house, you know. If you gentlemen will drop around to the hotel this afternoon, say about four o'clock, I'll see that you meet him."

"I'm tied up this afternoon," said Winton. "How about you, Joe?"

The groceryman answered indifferently: "I guess I could make it."

"I'll be in the lobby at four," said Oskins, and bustled away.

"Oskins is a pretty good sort," remarked the banker as if some explanation were necessary. "We carry the hotel for a little more than we would, ordinarily, but on the other hand he's in a position to do us a lot of good turns. Sends us a

pretty good bunch of business altogether. You'd better drop around and meet this man Saxton, Joe. Can't tell what might come of it."

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGER IN WESTOVER

JOE PADDOCK was wholesomely aware of the hustling talents of his fellow townsmen. He loved Henry Winton and his business friends and admired them tremendously.

Modestly, he felt himself inferior to these live wires—it was so often difficult for him to hold up his end in the game which they played with such tireless and brilliant enthusiasm.

But the groceryman was not at all pleased with the idea of going to the hotel at four o'clock to meet the gentleman who had so impressed Mr. Oskins. He grumbled that he wasn't going to push himself on a total stranger. It might be all right for people like Oskins and for newspaper reporters and promoters and such, but as for himself—well, he wasn't that kind—he had a little decent reserve, he did. If it wasn't for good old Henry Winton and the First National he'd not do it—not for all the boosters in Westover. Still, on the other hand, the boys were all pushing for Westover and whatever good came to Westover he would share. This Mr. Saxton might bring a manufacturing plant of some sort to Westover with hundreds—it might be thousands—of employees to rent houses and buy clothing and groceries, and a big banking business for somebody. You never could tell. Such things happened to other cities. Some one really ought to get in touch with him. For a man to accept his portion of whatever good came to his city without doing his share toward pushing the community interests was not exactly playing the game. Joe Paddock honestly wished to play the game. He guessed he'd just walk over to the hotel and maybe meet Mr. Saxton

casually. No—he'd better take his car. Mr. Saxton might like to drive around for an hour or so. It would be a wonderful personal opportunity—being the first one to meet and show him around—if he should really be figuring on starting something big.

In the somewhat ornate lobby of the Palace, Joe tried to appear as if he had merely dropped in to purchase a cigar. He managed to spend some time at the cigar counter making a selection (his vest pocket was already full) and, while waiting for his change, looked indifferently over the guests in the lobby. Neither Oskins nor any one as imposing as Saxton was to be seen. The groceryman purchased a newspaper. He had already read it—and again waited for his change. The Mayor, George Riley, chanced to pass that way and Joe laid hold of him eagerly. They were exchanging the usual “How’s business?” with the accepted formula on the increase of building permits and the growth of bank deposits, when Oskins appeared suddenly at the groceryman’s elbow with: “Excuse me, gentlemen—Mr. Paddock, Mayor Riley—I want to introduce you to Mr. Saxton. Mr. Saxton is from Kansas City. He is spending some time in Westover. I am sure he will be glad to know you gentlemen. Excuse me please, they want me at the desk for something.”

It seemed to Joe Paddock that the stranger was regarding him with rather more interest than the occasion warranted and he was struck by something familiar in the man’s face—what was it—could he have met him somewhere?—those eyes, serene, kindly, shadowed with sadness.

He was distinctly conscious of a little thrill of pleasure when Saxton, instead of giving all his attention to the Mayor,

said: “You are in the grocery business, I understand, Mr. Paddock.”

The groceryman answered with pardonable pride: “Yes, sir, twenty years now—right here in Westover.”

The stranger appeared unusually thoughtful. “Twenty years,” he said, and his voice warmed the groceryman’s heart.

Joe was about to ask, “Haven’t I met you before?” when Mayor Riley broke in with: “Are you interested in the grocery business, Mr. Saxton?”

“Oh, no, not at all. That is, not directly, in the way that you mean. We are all of us bound to be more or less interested in the grocery business, don’t you think—particularly at meal time?”

The Mayor and the groceryman laughed and the tiny flame in Joe’s heart grew brighter.

Encouraged by the stranger’s genial humor the Mayor asked courteously, “And what line of business *are* you particularly interested in, Mr. Saxton?”

Joe waited breathlessly for the answer.

Mr. Saxton replied carefully: “Just at present, Mayor Riley, I am making a study—I may say in fact a survey of certain conditions throughout the country. Frankly, it is for that purpose that I have come to your city.”

The groceryman drew a long breath. Oskins was right in his estimate of the importance of this man’s presence in Westover.

“Ah,” said the Mayor, “speaking for the city, Mr. Saxton, we shall be very glad indeed to extend to you every courtesy—heh, Joe?”

“I should say yes,” exclaimed the groceryman in his best boosting vein. “And we’ll be mighty glad for the opportunity. What do you say to a little drive around this afternoon, Mr. Saxton? I have my car right here. You’ll come, too, won’t you, Mayor?”

“Sorry, Joe, but I can’t this afternoon—council meeting to-night, you know.”

“I shall be very glad to go, Mr. Paddock,” said Saxton genially.

As he drove carefully down State Street toward his store with Mr. Saxton beside him, Joe Paddock was a different man from the gloomy creature who had so reluctantly entered the lobby of the Palace less than an hour before. The personality of the stranger—that impression of his wide experience and deep knowledge of men and affairs—the feeling of his inner strength and steadfast purpose, together with the thought of all that his presence in Westover might mean, quickened the groceryman’s spirit to new life. “He’s big,” said Joe to himself, “just naturally big—you can’t help feeling it every time he looks at you.”

“Ever been in Westover before, Mr. Saxton?”

“I have passed through several times. That is all.”

“Can’t get over the impression that I have seen you somewhere.”

The groceryman, because the State Street traffic demanded all his attention, did not see the stranger’s eyes as he answered gravely: “Perhaps.” Then he added the usual commonplace: “This is a small world, Mr. Paddock.”

“You won’t mind if I stop at the store? I’ll only be a minute—want to tell ’em I won’t be back.”

“Certainly, I’ll just wait in the car. Please don’t hurry on my account.” Mr. Saxton looked at the groceryman’s place of business with an interest which pleased Joe mightily.

Hurrying through the store with an air of importance, the groceryman bustled into his office, glanced at the unopened letters on his desk, hurried out to the cash register, opened the till, shut it again, spoke to the delivery boy, greeted customers with a hasty nod and briskly said to the listless clerk: “Bill, I’m goin’ out—won’t be back this afternoon—you see to things and close up. Got to show big business man from Kansas City around town. So long.”

Bill gazed wearily after the retreating form of his energetic employer.

“I guess you’ve already seen the downtown district,” said Joe, as he settled himself under the wheel beside his guest.

“This is State Street—principal business street—First National on corner two blocks west. I’m a director—Henry Winton’s president. Be glad to do anything we can for you in the banking line, Mr. Saxton. Four new business buildings under construction right now. Two on State, one on Washington—Washington crosses State, next corner there—one on Hope. Hope is next street south. We’ll start out Lincoln Avenue and go through the park. Building permits last month show one hundred per cent increase over last year. Bank deposits about doubled. Gosh! That fellow just missed us—traffic almost as badly congested as Kansas City.”

They turned into Lincoln Boulevard and the going was easier. Joe relaxed his tense grip on the wheel.

“So you are interested in Westover, are you, Mr. Saxton—sort of looking us over, heh? Well, sir, you would go a long way to find a better town.”

“Westover seems to be a very progressive city,” agreed Mr. Saxton.

“Progressive is right,” said Joe stoutly. “Wonderful opening for a big factory or manufacturing plant of any kind. That’s what you’re looking for, I suppose.”

“You’ll pardon me, Mr. Paddock,” returned Saxton gently, “but I am not at liberty just at present to reveal the exact nature of the investment which I—I should say my principal—desires to make. I am only a confidential agent in the matter. I can assure you, however, that the interests which I represent are very large. You, as a business man, will understand of course why I cannot, at this time, go further. I am not ready yet to make even this much too generally known but I feel sure that you will respect my confidence.”

The groceryman was deeply moved. He felt that such an expression from a man like Mr. Saxton was no mean compliment. And indeed he was right. Dan Matthews’ confidential agent was not often mistaken in his judgments of men. Joe Paddock was worthy.

The groceryman answered with unassumed dignity: “Thank you, Mr. Saxton,” while his honest heart swelled with pride.

“This is our park—Roosevelt Park. That building over there beyond the band stand is the armory. This one here on our right is the Public Library.”

“Carnegie, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, Westover could scarcely afford a library building like that, you know. Wonderful thing for a man to give his millions to such good works, Mr. Saxton.”

The groceryman’s guest agreed heartily. “It is a good work; Mr. Carnegie is worthy of every honor. You say that you have lived in Westover twenty years, Mr. Paddock?”

“I’ve been in business here twenty years. I was born and raised on a farm eight miles west of town. My father and mother settled here in the early days. They are living on the old place yet. When I finished my university course—our State University here in Westover, we’ll drive around there presently—I married and started in the grocery business.”

He paused and for some reason Saxton turned his head to look thoughtfully at his companion’s face. When Joe continued, his voice seemed to drag a little. “My wife was a country girl—neighboring farm—we were classmates in the University. I always liked the farm myself but she—well, after finishing school she didn’t care much for the country life and so we moved into town.”

He suddenly, brightened up. “This is our Masonic Temple—you’re not a Mason, Mr. Saxton?”

“No. That is a beautiful building. How many children, Mr. Paddock?”

“Only one, a girl. She graduated from the University last year.”

“You have brothers and sisters?”

“No, there were four of us, three boys and a girl. I am the only one left.”

They saw the Odd Fellows’ Hall. Mr. Saxton answered that he was not an Odd Fellow.

“You are a family man, are you, Mr. Saxton?”

And this time it was the groceryman who turned his head as Saxton answered: “I am alone in the world now, Mr. Paddock.”

They had viewed the County Hospital, Court House, City Hall, ice plant, power house, sash and door factory, flour mills and elevators, cold storage plant, warehouse, high school and the University, and were driving down a wide avenue between trim, unfenced lawns shaded by stately trees when the groceryman, pointing, said: “That’s my place—the house with the vines over the porch. We’ll have you for dinner some evening soon.”

“I should be delighted,” returned Saxton, looking with interest at the groceryman’s modest but substantial home.

“House is a little old,” commented Joe, and again his voice dragged. “Built it the year we were married.”

“That big show place, across the street in the next block, is Henry Winton’s.”

“You have many beautiful homes in Westover, Mr. Paddock.”

“Yes, sir, we have some mighty fine places.”

Saxton looked at his host. For some reason the groceryman was speaking with not quite the buoyant spirit which had marked his talk earlier in the drive. “I notice several fine churches, too.”

“Churches? Oh, yes, we have them all. I’m a Presbyterian myself. Father and mother were just about the first Presbyterians in Westover County. Henry Winton, he’s a Baptist. His folks started the Baptist Church same as mine did the Presbyterian. Mayor Riley and his folks are

Congregationalists. What's yours, Mr. Saxton? I take it that you are a church member."

"I have been a member of the Old Commons Church in Kansas City for the last fifteen years. You consider that churches are a great asset to a town, do you not, Mr. Paddock? I mean from a purely business point of view?"

"No doubt about it, sir," returned the groceryman heartily. "And you'll find Westover as well fixed in that line as any city of its size in the country. We're mighty proud of our churches. Most of our civic leaders are members somewhere. And our preachers—take 'em as a whole—are a mighty practical and down-to-date bunch. Just as good rustlers—most of 'em—as the best of our live wires in business. Take my own pastor, Dr. Coleman, he's president of the Kiwanis Club. The Methodist minister, Reverend Wilson, he's a member of the board of directors of the Chamber of Commerce. The ministers have their ministerial association and take just as much interest in all sorts of civic affairs as if they were merchants, or real estate men, or bankers, or in any other business. Why, the Congregational pastor, Mr. Carter, he's chairman of the finance committee of our Boosters' club. He's starting a drive right now for a hundred thousand dollar advertising fund. Going to put the advantages of Westover in every high-class magazine in the country. It's just like Dr. Coleman said in his sermon last Sunday: 'The world demands a practical Christianity, and we've got to make religion pay, right here on earth, if we expect to interest people in it.' And then he went on to show how the money spent in Foreign Missions had opened up those heathen countries to our commerce until the returns in dollars and cents were already a thousand times more than the total cost

of the work. Wish you would come around to our services, Mr. Saxton. You'd like Dr. Coleman. He's a regular he-man. Come next Sunday. He's goin' to preach on 'Fig Leaf Fashions.' How's that for a live one—nothing slow about that, heh? Perhaps you have noticed his ad in the papers.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Saxton, “I have. And is Westover well organized in community work?”

“We certainly are. There is the Chamber of Commerce, the Get-together Club, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Boosters, beside our Merchant's Association, Wholesale and Retail, Board of Trade, Real Estate Board, Bar Association, Medical Association, Automobile Dealers' Association, Labor Council and a lot more.”

“And your charities and welfare work, down-to-date too, I suppose?”

“Oh, sure—our Organized Charities has a big drive every year. You see, by putting the charities of the city in the hands of paid professionals we eliminate a lot of unworthy cases and cut the total cost down to the minimum. Our citizens are really generous in their subscriptions, Mr. Saxton. And beside this almost every club and order and lodge has a benevolent fund, you know. Of course we have the Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, and a host of other similar organizations that are supported by the town in one way or another and are all doing good work, too.

“Well, here we are at the country club. Thought you might like to drop in for a little while. We're likely to find some of the men you'll want to meet about this time of day.”

As they walked toward the wide steps, leading to the main entrance, the groceryman remarked: “Not so grand as some of your big city clubs, Mr. Saxton, but we have the same

spirit. We manage to give some mighty swell affairs occasionally at that.”

“I have no doubt that you do. The club presents a very creditable appearance indeed. I have observed, too, that spirit is not at all dependent upon size. For instance, consider the flea.”

The groceryman roared with laughter and slapped his guest on the back. “That’s a good one—that’s a dandy.”

After registering Mr. Saxton, in due form, and directing that a visitor’s card be mailed to him at his hotel, the groceryman, with an air of mystery, drew his guest to one side. “I don’t know,” he said in a low confidential tone, “perhaps I ought not to mention it, but—well, really I don’t want to make a mistake—would you, ah, would you care for a little drink?”

“Thank you, no,” replied Mr. Saxton, in exactly the courteous, matter-of-fact tone that he would have used in declining an offered cup of tea.

“It’s the real stuff,” assured the groceryman anxiously. “I almost never drink myself—just a little nip once in a great while, you know. But we have it here and if you like, don’t hesitate.”

“No, thank you.”

Several men came in, greeted the groceryman, were introduced to Mr. Saxton and went on to the locker room. When the door at the end of a corridor leading to the locker room opened, shouts of boisterous laughter with a confusion of hearty voices reached the groceryman and his guest. Several of the members, after meeting the stranger, winked slyly at Joe and nodded toward the door at the end of the corridor with a significant look toward the politely

unobserving man from Kansas City. But Joe always frowned a warning with a negative shake of his head.

The good fellows really wished to be hospitable to the groceryman's friend but if he would not—well, they guessed it was up to old Joe to entertain him. Mayor Riley came, inquired anxiously what Mr. Saxton thought of Westover, made the customary silent but significant signals to Joe, was frowned upon by the groceryman and went his way to the locker room. Henry Winton came. The banker acknowledged the introduction to the guest as if Mr. Saxton were an old friend of his old friend, Joe Paddock, discussed briefly the business situation in Kansas City, Westover and throughout the country, and went the way of his fellow club members. It was significant that Banker Winton needed no warning look from the groceryman.

And so, presently, the groceryman and Mr. Saxton were seated in a quiet corner of the veranda overlooking the tennis courts while, in the locker room and on the golf course, Mayor Riley and Banker Winton were making known to their club friends and fellow citizens the probable significance of Mr. Saxton's presence in Westover.

“Smoke?” inquired Joe, offering a cigar.

“Thank you—Oh, my favorite brand! Do you know, Mr. Paddock, every time I smoke a really good cigar I am nervous.”

“That's too bad.”

“Yes—you see, smoking makes me wonder how long it will be before the disciples of Volstead make my innocent pleasure illegal, and when smoking is made a crime I know that I shall develop criminal tendencies.”

“Heh? Oh, I see,” laughed Joe. “Well, I guess you have no cause to worry. They may succeed in prohibiting the use of tobacco but, law or no law, we’ll smoke just the same.”

“As long as they leave us our locker rooms,” murmured Mr. Saxton in an odd tone.

And, for some reason, Joe Paddock did not laugh.

“Mr. Saxton,” he said while they watched the tennis players, “I have been wanting to ask you all the afternoon—what, in your opinion, is the general effect of the Volstead Act? I mean, particularly, upon the home life and upon the characters of our young people?”

Mr. Saxton did not answer. He was watching two young people, a man and a woman, who were playing a vigorous game on the nearest court.

Joe was about to repeat his question when his guest exclaimed: “What a beautiful girl! Who is she?”

The groceryman promptly dismissed the prohibition question.

“That, Mr. Saxton, is my daughter, Georgia.”

Mr. Saxton turned to his host with a hearty: “Indeed, sir, I congratulate you. She is a wonderful girl—such vigor, such grace, such spirit!”

Joe Paddock answered slowly, and there was that in his voice and in his face which deepened the shadows of sadness in the dark eyes of his guest. “Georgia and I have always been good pals. She’s grown up now—finished university course last year. Can’t seem to make myself believe it—don’t see as much of her these days as I used to.”

Presently he continued: “That chap with her is Jack Ellory. I want you to meet him. He is one of our most promising

young business men—automobiles. Takes an active part in every progressive movement. President of our Organized Charities. A genuine public-spirited, up-and-coming citizen. Everybody says that Jack is bound to be a big man some day. He and Georgia have been chums since they attended kindergarten together. Good family, too. Parents both dead—has no one but himself—inherited enough to start him in business.”

It was evident that the groceryman was making an effort to speak with enthusiasm. But, with his eyes fixed upon his daughter and her partner, his voice dragged into a dull spiritless monotone. “Georgia is a good girl, Mr. Saxton,” he finished with a determined effort. “She and I have always been regular pals.”

And the groceryman felt that this stranger, whose face, with the dark brooding eyes, seemed so hauntingly familiar, that the stranger somehow understood.

CHAPTER V

THE GROCERYMAN'S DAUGHTER

MORNING—soft gray sky in the east. Starlight waning pale and dim. Lingering fragrance of the night. Cool earthy smell of growing things wet with dew. Clouds rose-pink and gold, purple-shadowed with edges of shining silver. Sunlight under the horizon. The day.

In a tree just outside the window of Georgia Paddock's room a mother bird perched on a twig close by her nest and surveyed her tiny brood. The fledglings, with wide-open mouths, clamored feebly for their breakfast. From the topmost bough the father sang his morning hymn. Then, together, the parents flew down to the lawn and began their day's work.

The milkman's Ford rattled down the street and stopped. The man's hurrying steps on the cement walk echoed around the silent house. The screen door of the back porch slammed. The sound of the hurrying feet was repeated—with a clattering whirr the Ford moved on.

Georgia turned her head on the pillow and opened her eyes. Dreamily she looked at the gray square of light between the window hangings, and through the open casement heard the song of the birds. With a slow luxurious movement of her body and a delicious yawn she turned her back to the window and nestled under the covers for another nap. And strangely enough, at that moment, while she lay half asleep and half

awake, she thought of Mr. Saxton. Where had she seen that face before?

Her father had introduced her, with Jack Ellory, to Mr. Saxton at the club yesterday afternoon. They had chatted a moment with the groceryman and his guest and then had gone on to change after their somewhat strenuous hour at tennis. But the man's face had haunted her all that evening. She felt certain that somewhere, sometime, she had seen him before. Jack, too, had been struck with the same feeling that this was not the first time that he had stood face to face with the man who, so far as they knew, was a stranger. Who was he anyway? The name, Saxton, meant nothing. And why was he her father's guest? How had her father met him? When Jack returned from the locker room he had told her that Mr. Saxton was a big business man from Kansas City and that he was in Westover on a mission which might result in a good thing for everybody. But that information was of no particular importance to Georgia. It was of much greater importance that Jack Ellory, himself, was going to be a man of big business.

The girl moved uneasily and adjusted her pillow. When Jack was a big business man with whom would he share his success? At that moment—though Georgia would never have confessed it to any one and had she been more wide awake would not have admitted it even to herself—that question was, for her, the most important question in all the world. As one will in those half-dreaming moments, the girl drifted on the wide, sleepily flowing stream of memories.

It all started in those early years when she and Jack sometimes played at "keeping house." But, even then, the game was always of her choosing and he had made himself a

stern papa to her dolls. At one period he had stoutly informed all the world that he was going to marry Georgia when they grew up. But the kindergarten had quickly put an end to all that and forced her to suffer tearfully his rude taunts, contemptuous sneers, and cruel teasing. What a masterful leader he had been in every sort of mischief—always bullying the other boys, always fighting, boasting, showing off. How he had scorned all games in which girls had a part. She wondered did he not, in his heart, scorn them still? She sometimes thought he did, but there were other times, when—grade school, high school and the University—from scorning the girls he came to tolerate, then to accept and, finally, to seek their company. He had been masterful always, but was less and less a bully—boasted not so openly, and showed off not quite so conspicuously as he moved up in life, grade by grade. Always they had gone with the same crowd. Nearly always he had preferred her. Since the period of their first going out together, she had felt toward him something very like fear. And he had seemed to feel the same toward her. It was strange—she wondered why. With other boys of her set she had been—well, no more a prude than other girls, and these other boys had taken what her grandparents would have called liberties. But with Jack there had been nothing of that sort though she knew—as girls know such things—that with the others he had been as bold as the boldest. With the passing of their university years her fear, if it was fear, of him had grown until now. She wondered what sort of a man Jack Ellory really was anyway. Her father thought highly of him as a business man. He was admired and praised by the community. But after business hours? There was nothing slow about their set. Some of their parties—had they gone too far last night? Harry Winton *did* drink too much—it was

disgusting. Might there not be a very real danger in their boasted freedom? Danger of what? Jack went to parties where she was not invited. She had heard some things—why did she feel afraid when she was with him—if it *was* fear? She was not afraid—that was all nonsense, but if it was not fear what was it?

Not many of her girl friends who had married had escaped unhappiness. She thought of some of the confidences she had received. Were all men like that? She recalled the married men she had seen with women who were not their wives, at some of the places frequented by her set. Grandfather and Grandmother Paddock—what a dear, loving old couple! Fifty years together and sweethearts still. Was such happiness possible in this generation? Could such a home ever be, to her or to any one whom she knew, more than an idle dream? The plays that she saw, the motion pictures, the newspapers, magazines, novels, the popular songs, the jokes in the funny papers—was there anywhere in this modern world a love like that of her grandparents? If there *was* why didn't some one talk or write or sing about it? Why did everybody talk and write novels and stories and songs and make plays and pictures about the other thing?

The living room of the Paddock home was in keeping with the exterior. It was old-fashioned enough to have dignity but, with each progressing year, Mrs. Paddock had been careful that modern effects were not lacking. On the shelves of the bookcases Dickens and Ruskin and Hawthorne touched elbows with the latest-born of the realists. On the fine old Steinway piano were sheets of popular songs. A mahogany library table of a past period held a magazine of the super-

intellectuals, a novel of sex madness, a volume of Hindu poetry, a denominational church paper, the latest authority on bridge, and a Bible. The walls were hung with pictures—a landscape in oils, painted by Mrs. Paddock with the help of a teacher, from a study which she had received with an art magazine, two fine old engravings, three bargain counter etchings and an excellent reproduction of the head of Jesus from Hoffmann's "Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler." Directly under this picture of the lowly Nazarene a radio stood ready with an inexhaustible program of jazz.

When Georgia Paddock came down to the living room that morning her father, with an air of ominous self-control, was pretending to read the *Herald*. Mrs. Paddock stood before the gas log, glazed tile and golden oak fireplace. From her mother's somewhat martial attitude and the set expression of her rather classical countenance the daughter knew that the domestic barometer registered slightly colder.

People quite generally remarked that the beautiful daughter of the groceryman was exactly like her mother. And, in a way, the people were right. Laura Louise Paddock certainly was not fat. By unlimited worrying and the strenuous use of every known method—exercises, diets, treatments, salts, baths, massage, and mental suggestion—she still managed to look anything but matronly. That she managed, also, to look anything but motherly was quite beside the all-important question of the day.

But it must not be understood by this, that Georgia's mother was actually lacking in those finer qualities of motherhood which the world agrees are, after all, woman's most enduring charm. It was only that by certain well known, modern, intellectual processes this instinctive and natural

motherliness in Mrs. Paddock had been refined to a point where it was almost invisible to the naked eye.

With an air of critical, if loving, authority Mrs. Paddock noted every detail of her daughter's appearance. Had she not been so unmistakably Georgia's mother one might have fancied that, in her expression of proud possession, there was a slight touch of envy—the girl's beauty was so fresh, and vigorous, and youthful.

"I'm sorry if I am late, Mother," said Georgia, and there was a wistful look in the frank, gray eyes as if the girl's early morning thoughts lingered with her still.

The groceryman dropped his paper and smiling cheerfully at his daughter rose from his chair.

Mrs. Paddock returned evenly: "It is of no importance, I suppose. The cook will probably give notice. Your father's business does not matter. As for *my* affairs—they, of course, are not to be considered."

The wistfulness vanished from the girl's face and in its stead came a look of proud rebellion. Her voice was coolly impudent. "Oh, bunk, Mother, it's not five minutes past our usual breakfast time."

Joe looked at his watch. "Four minutes exactly," he said with forced good humor. "Good morning, dear. You look fresh as a posy. Come on, Mother, let's eat."

He went to the girl and put his arm around her with a comforting little hug which she acknowledged with a kiss. Then they followed his wife and mother to the dining room.

Mrs. Paddock glanced competently over the details of the breakfast table. With the studied effort at calmness, of one

announcing a national disaster, she spoke to the maid: “Ella, there are no fruit knives.”

A moment later she addressed her husband in exactly the same tone: “Joe, this fruit is simply impossible! I should think that, as long as you are in the grocery business, you might at least supply your own family with decent food!”

“It’s hard to find any good fruit just now,” Joe answered mildly, “between seasons, you know.”

“Others seem to know where to find it. The fruit salad at Mrs. Gordon’s luncheon last Thursday was simply perfect. What have you been doing since yesterday morning, Georgia? I never see you any more except at breakfast.”

“Dad and I lunched at home—strikes me you are the one to give an account of yourself, Mother dear.”

“You dined at the country club, I suppose?”

“Not much! Catch me feeding on the junk they serve there, if I can help! Jack and I had some tennis, then we went to Tony’s Place for eats, danced a while and played around with the bunch till quittin’ time. How did you and dad spend your evening? Did you foregather with some of the elect to sample their home-brew and discuss the morals of the younger generation—or did you fight peacefully at home?”

“Georgia!”

“Yes, Mother dear.”

Mrs. Paddock loftily withdrew into her superior self. The groceryman was mutely feeling inferior and hopelessly wondering what was wrong. Georgia was thinking of Grandpa and Grandma Paddock.

“You’ll have to walk down town this morning, Joe,” said Mrs. Paddock as her husband pushed back his chair. “I want

the car.”

“All right,” Joe returned heartily. “Exercise will be good for me.”

“And you must put some money in the bank for me—I have overdrawn my account.”

“All right, Mother, I’ll fix you up. By the way, I’d like to ask Mr. Saxton for dinner some evening soon—if it’s convenient.”

“And who is Mr. Saxton?”

“You know—the man I told you about last night—from Kansas City—represents big interests. He’s looking into Westover with a view to establishing an industrial plant of some sort. I thought—”

“Why don’t you take him to the Palace or to your club?”

“Well, I thought—well, you see, he’s the sort of a man who would really enjoy a simple home dinner.”

“Well, I wouldn’t particularly enjoy entertaining some one we know nothing about. Besides, if he really *is* a man of any importance and you are trying to impress him with your position in Westover it would be a sad mistake to try to entertain him in *this* house—it’s quite impossible.”

“Oh, Mother,” cried Georgia. “Be a good sport—if dad wants to bring a friend to dinner—”

“Georgia! How many times have I assured you that I have no ambition to be, what you call, a good sport?”

The groceryman was already on his way to the front door.

Georgia caught him as he was going down the steps.

“Dad, let me drive you down to the store. I’d love to—it’s such a glorious morning. I’ll bring the car straight home.”

“Never mind, daughter, I’d just as soon walk—exercise do me good.”

“Please let me, Daddy,” she urged.

“Nope—need the exercise—by-by.”

She stood in the doorway watching him down the street.

The telephone rang. The instrument was in the hall and Georgia turned from the door to answer the call. As she took down the receiver her back was toward the living room so that she did not notice her mother, who had also heard the bell and was coming to answer. Mrs. Paddock, seeing her daughter at the phone, paused in the living room door and waited, unnoticed by the girl, who was speaking into the instrument.

In the customary, matter-of-fact, impersonal voice: “Hello —”

A shade of doubtful recognition—not at all glad to hear the voice at the other end of the line: “Who is speaking, please?”

With a touch of mocking surprise: “Oh-h, it is? Well—” sarcastically, “not exactly.”

Cheerfully: “No, I’m not the maid—I’m not the cook either. Father has just left the house. You can get him at the store in half an hour, ring 702—”

Impudently: “Oh, you do—well, I don’t think she is in.”

With positive disapproval: “Oh, she did—well, you can’t talk to Mrs. Paddock just now. She is—”

A furious exclamation caused the girl to look hastily over her shoulder. Her mother was upon her with: “Georgia Paddock! I never heard such impudent rudeness in all my life—Give me that receiver!”

The daughter spoke into the instrument with mocking sweetness: “I’m sorry, Mr. Astell, I find that mother *is* here after all.”

With her lips still close to the instrument she added: “Mother, dear, Mr. Astell wishes to speak to you—Mr. Edward Alton Astell.”

The daughter stood aside but did not leave the hall while her mother spoke over the wire.

“Yes, Mr. Astell—

“Good morning, isn’t it rather early for you?—

“Oh, how *perfectly* charming of you—yes, indeed, it is *perfectly* beautiful—

“Oh, but you know I *love* to rise at an early hour when nature is so fragrant and cool and sweet—

“Yes—yes—how perfectly *wonderful*—

“You should hear the birds in our trees. The air fairly rings with their music, and the flowers are *so* wonderful in their dewy freshness—

“Yes—

“Yes—

“Oh, yes—

“How wonderful—so few men are able to appreciate such things. I don’t wonder that you find your greatest inspiration in the early morning—

“At eleven o’clock—

“Oh, thank you—thank you so much. It is so generous of you to give poor little me so much of your valuable time—

“How charming of you to say that—

“I only wish it *were* true—

“Until eleven—good-by.”

She hung the receiver gently on the hook and whirled on her daughter: “Now, young lady, perhaps you will be good enough to explain how you dare to treat a man like Mr. Astell with such unheard of rudeness?”

Georgia stood her ground with the frank contempt of parental authority so characteristic of her generation.

“Perhaps *you* will explain why that darned snob calls you up and you make appointments with him when he wouldn’t even speak to father on a bet.”

“Mr. Astell is one of our few real gentlemen. It is a privilege to have his friendship. I’m consulting him about our Literary Club program. He is not only an authority on art and literature, he is, himself, a distinguished author. He lives in a world very different from the world in which your father moves. You can’t expect a genius of Mr. Astell’s standing to have anything in common with mere grocery men.”

“Distinguished author! Your foot! Why, you know, he never wrote but one fool novel and had to pay to have that published. No one outside of Westover ever even heard of the silly indecent thing—and no one here ever read it, except a bunch of half-baked women that he gave autographed copies to. Genius—my eye! He’s a common, nasty-minded snob who would be cleaning cuspidors for his living if his father hadn’t left him enough money to keep him.”

The girl caught her breath with a choking sob and her angry eyes filled with tears. “Oh, Mother—Mother, what’s the matter with us all? You’re not a bit like you used to be when I was little—and I—I guess I’m going crazy too, chasing around day and night. Nobody seems to want the simple, honest, unpretentious, decent things any more. Why

can't we be like Grandpa and Grandma Paddock? Poor dad looks so old and worried and lonesome and discouraged. And you—you—you don't care for anything but your rotten old culture. I—I tell you, I can't stand it, Mother! I can't stand it!"

She rushed upstairs and Mrs. Paddock heard the door of her daughter's room slam.

For several minutes Mrs. Paddock stood as motionless as a woman carved in wood.

Slowly the strained, shocked expression of her face changed and the light of motherhood came into her eyes. Slowly, almost reluctantly, as if forced by some inner power that was stronger than her will, she went up the stairway.

Georgia, who had thrown herself on the bed with her face buried in the pillow of her morning dreams, heard a knock at the door. She did not answer. Then a voice—a gentle voice—called: "Georgia—it is mother—may I come in, dear?"

"No," cried the girl, "I don't want to see you. I don't want to see any one!"

The girl felt, rather than heard, the door open quietly. She felt some one softly crossing the room. Then an arm encircled her trembling shoulders. She turned her head impatiently on the pillow. Her mother was kneeling beside the bed. Her mother's face was close beside her own. Her mother's cheeks were wet.

CHAPTER VI

PAST AND PRESENT

THE groceryman, on his way down town, was physically conscious of the morning and walked briskly enough, but his spirit dragged miserably along, unmoved by the familiar objects and incidents of the friendly street.

Sam Gordon's new house was nearly finished. Joe wondered dully if Sam and his wife would be happy there. Sam had appeared sort of glum and worried lately—not like his old jolly self. His business was all right—Sam banked at the First National and bought his groceries at Joe's store—could it be the family—there had been some talk—too bad if there was anything really wrong—with their new house so nearly ready. Jim Watson hailed the groceryman with an invitation to ride. Joe forced a cheerful return to the neighborly greeting and declined—he needed exercise. Watson and his wife put on some lively parties at their home. Joe wondered if there was anything in the whispered report that they were going to separate. The new Congregational Church was a mighty costly-looking edifice. He wondered how much they owed on it. He guessed George Riley had been forced to put up a good share of the money and would likely have to come across with a lot more before they finished. The groceryman, himself, had made a generous contribution to the rival house of God—didn't want to—had to support his own church; but Riley and a number of other Congregationalists traded at his store and banked at the First National. That man Saxton, yesterday—unusual sort of man, big though, almighty big—not often a man of his caliber is so

interested in churches, that is, not in exactly the way that Saxton was. Joe wished that he had gotten Saxton's views on the effect of prohibition on the homes and the young people. The bunch that Georgia ran with were setting a good pace. The girl was all right though; she knew when to stop—no danger for her. These modern girls knew a lot about things. How much did they really know anyway? He wished he hadn't offered Saxton a drink. What in thunder did he want to go and pull a bonehead like that for anyway? Saxton's friendship might easily result in big money—perhaps—perhaps—if he played his cards just right he might be able to give Laura some of the expensive things she was always wanting. He didn't care for expensive things himself. A quiet farm home life such as father and mother lived—that was the thing for him. The noisy activity of State Street annoyed him. He didn't want to go to the store to-day. He believed he would run out to the farm and see the old folks. No, Laura wanted the car. He'd call up Saxton and ask him to lunch. Why the dickens didn't Jack Ellory ask Georgia to marry him? In his day, no young couple could be together as much as Georgia and Jack without something coming of it.

The groceryman walked briskly through the store to his office where he sat down to his desk and pretended to read his letters. In the old days he used to spend the busy hours of the morning in the store greeting his customers and helping the clerks serve them. He didn't seem to want to meet people lately. Glad he met Saxton though—Saxton was different. Funny how sure he felt that he had seen him somewhere before. He wished Laura would let him invite Saxton to dinner. What in thunder was the matter anyway? With sudden determination he pulled open a drawer in his desk and took from it a photograph. It was the portrait of a beautiful young

woman with a baby in her arms and the woman's face was glorified by the holy passion of her motherhood. His wife and baby, Georgia.

With the bustling activity of his business on the other side of the glass partition, his morning mail lying on the desk before him, and the ringing of the cash register in his ears, the groceryman gazed at the old photograph and searched the years that had passed since the camera made that record of his happiness.

Their sweetheart days—their engagement—the first years of their married life. Surely if ever there was a marriage for love, theirs had been—and was yet—he assured himself stoutly. If a man of forty-five is not quite so demonstrative in his affections does that mean that his love is less sincere and true? No, no—it means, rather, that the current of his passion has deepened and broadened. If the stream of his love runs with less noise, it as surely flows with more strength. The groceryman knew that his love for his wife was all that it had ever been—all and more. He was almost, if not quite, as sure of his wife's love. In spite of the cloud which had come over their home there were occasions—less and less frequent, he feared—when Laura was the wife and mother of that old photograph. How then had they come to such a pass? Perhaps if their boy had lived—the groceryman's eyes grew misty. The boy had come to them two years after Georgia's birth. He was just beginning to walk alone when he left them.

It was soon after the boy's death that Mrs. Paddock had developed an absorbing interest in church affairs. For a year or more, night and day, she had gone about what her pastor assured her was her Master's business—sewing circles, bazaars, rummage sales, socials, entertainments, raising

money for the minister's salary, for a new carpet, for pulpit furniture. Then, with a change of pastors, her religious fervor cooled and she had entered upon a period of scholarship. She again attended the university classes—economics, astronomy, chemistry, French—until a sudden interest in civic clubs and politics left her not a moment for things academic. This political period, in turn, gave way to a program of welfare work—organized charities, hospitals, health centers, surveys, and social science. And then came art, with lectures to attend, exhibitions to manage, courses of study, and lessons in painting. Music followed next with more club courses of study—long hours at the piano, recitals to attend and recitals to give, programs and conventions. And so they had arrived by easy stages at her present absorbing interest in literature and what she called “the higher culture.” Devotedly, now, she worshiped at the shrines of the intellectuals. She aspired to be one of the few. She read the unexpurgated ancients and those moderns of whom if they were expurgated there would be nothing left. She talked bravely and broadly of all matters pertaining to sex and discoursed at length upon the new freedom. Between club programs, lectures, studies, and talks, she was herself writing a book—a fearless novel for the very few who could understand.

And through all these changing periods of Mrs. Paddock's progress toward the higher things of life, Joe had gone every morning to his grocery store. Year in and year out, he had lived between the producers of food and the consumers of food. Day by day, he had helped to answer the universal prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread.” The groceryman burned no incense before the altars of intellectuality. The only incense he knew was the perfume of coffee and tea and spices and fruits and vegetables. He worshiped at no shrine of

Art or Letters; he bought and sold groceries. He bowed before no god of the superior culture; he paid his bills. And the reward of his labor was his home. For his devotion to the lowly business of answering the common prayer of the people, the groceryman had received for his wife and daughter and himself—bread.

That reminded him—Laura had told him that her account was overdrawn. He must write a check. And Georgia's allowance, too. He might as well write a check for that while he was about it. With his problem still unsolved, Joe Paddock laid the old photograph reverently back in the drawer and from another drawer took his checkbook. As he opened the book and wrote he was oppressed with the burden of his failure—for the groceryman knew, in his heart, that he had failed.

The protesting whine of the listless clerk came from behind his chair: "That darned kid is late again this morning—just got here—what'll I tell him?"

Joe carefully laid a blotter on the checks. "Send him in here to me."

The delivery boy came and stood before his employer.

His thin, undernourished body with its narrow shoulders and scrawny limbs was clothed in garments patched and faded. His colorless hair was unkempt, his face gaunt and old. He nervously fingered an old rag of a cap and his deep, somber, hollow eyes were sullenly fearful.

The groceryman looked the lad over—not unkindly. He was thinking: "Poor boy, he doesn't look very happy, either."

"Well, Davie," he said at last, "what's your trouble?"

“Bill said you wanted to see me.” The lad’s voice was thin and frightened, with an undertone of desperate antagonism. His manner was that of a trapped animal—wary, ready to fight if he must, but wanting most of all to escape.

“You are late again this morning, Davie.”

The lad fingered his cap in silence.

“You realize, don’t you, that I must have some one who will get out these morning deliveries on time?”

Davie did not speak.

“Well,” Joe demanded, sharply, “what have you to say? Can’t you talk?”

“Please, Mr. Paddock, for Christ’s sake don’t fire me. I can’t—I can’t lose my job now—” The boy’s words seemed literally torn from him. His features worked in an agony of fear, his eyes were wild and pleading, his bony fingers twisted his old cap with desperate strength. “I’ll do better, honest to God I will. It would be murder—plain murder—if you was to fire me now!” His words ended in a choking sob.

The groceryman suddenly remembered—he had heard somewhere that Davie’s mother was not well. The clerk, Bill, had said something about it a week or so back. Two years ago the carpenter-father had fallen from a scaffold while working on the Presbyterian Church and had never stood on his feet since. The carpenter and his wife, Mary, were both members of the church and the man had been donating his work when the accident occurred. Since he was hurt, they had not attended services and had failed to pay their dues. Those morning deliveries must be sent out on time. Oh, hang the morning deliveries!

“How is your father these days, Davie?”

The boy answered in a sullen monotone as if his outburst had left him weak and hopeless: "He's just the same."

"Can't the doctors do anything?"

"Doctors! Where'd we get money enough for a big hospital job like that? We're lucky if we eat."

The desperate brutality of the boy's reply startled the groceryman. "Your mother is pretty well, is she?"

"She—she's been in bed for a month past."

"Oh, that's too bad, Davie. Why didn't you tell me?"

"I told Bill."

"I'm sorry I didn't know—didn't realize, I mean—What's the trouble?"

"I don't know—just clean worn out, I guess. There ain't nobody to do nothing but me—Jimmie and Maud, they's too little."

"You have some one to stay with them during the day?"

"The neighbor women, they look in when they can. She's worse nights—I—I—that's what makes me late sometimes. I don't dare lose my job now, sir. I'll do better, honest to God I will."

The groceryman was thinking. "Organized Charities, I must report it. Don't know though—the boy is working."

"Davie," he said suddenly, "go and tell Bill I want to see him. You come back with him."

"Are you going to fire me?"

"No, Davie, we'll manage somehow. Go and fetch Bill."

When Davie returned with the clerk Mr. Paddock said: "Bill, I want you to give Davie, every day, everything he needs from the store. Charge it to me, but don't get the orders

mixed up with my family account. He is to have anything he wants from our stock every day until I tell you different. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

And Bill went to tell his fellow clerks: "Pretty soft for that darned kid, pretty soft, I'd say. The old man ought to 'a' tied the can on him—he would have, too, if it'd been one of *us*."

When the delivery boy, after trying with halting, stumbling, sobbing words to thank his employer, had gone to the waiting Ford, the groceryman was shocked to find himself thinking: "Suppose Laura Louise had married the young carpenter, Dave Bates. Would Laura now be 'just clean worn out' with no one but that slip of a boy to provide for her and her helpless husband and their little ones? Suppose Mary Graham—suppose I, Joe Paddock, had married Mary—would I be here in the grocery business with Laura's son working for me? Suppose—oh, what's the use supposing anything."

Life to the groceryman, just then, was a hopeless tangle with no beginning and no end to anything. He decided he would call up the house and ask Laura to drive out to the farm with him. Perhaps Georgia would go, too. If he could he would coax Laura to go with him for a walk in the woods, they would slip away and leave Georgia with the old folks. Perhaps, if they should go together to the old tree beside the pond in the heart of the woods where they had spent so many happy hours—where he had asked her to be his wife—perhaps—

He called his home.

The maid answered that Mrs. Paddock was out. Miss Georgia was in—Did he wish to speak to her?

“No, never mind.”

He hung up the receiver.

Where was Laura anyway? Of course, he remembered now, she had wanted the car. Great Scott, it was eleven o'clock!

The groceryman and Mr. Saxton lunched together.

Joe would have liked to talk to his new friend, if he had dared, about some things which he could not mention even to Henry Winton. Winton and Riley and nearly everybody that Joe knew had things of their own which they did not talk about. It was odd how the groceryman felt that he had known Saxton for many years.

CHAPTER VII

ONE EVENING

THAT small group of Westover men who were popularly said to be on the inside of every important financial enterprise and who were thus privileged to know well in advance every contemplated move in the progress of their city, lost no time in cultivating the acquaintance of Mr. Saxton. The information first passed in the locker room was amplified by conjectures in snatches of confidential talk during business hours, confirmed by Mr. Saxton's unmistakable interest in Westover, and certified by the personality of Mr. Saxton himself. But no one, so far, was sufficiently on the inside to know the exact nature of the large investments which the unknown powerful interests represented by Mr. Saxton were contemplating. They knew only that it was a big thing for Westover. That a big thing for Westover might also be a big thing for the individual who was sufficiently in with the man who held the whole matter in his hands was understood.

Aside from this—which, after all, was no more selfish than was necessary—the members of the inner circle had come to regard Mr. Saxton for something quite apart from the financial interests and the material hopes which he represented. The groceryman's feeling that he had seen the man before, that he had met him somewhere, was shared by Joe's friends, and each in his own way and time mentioned the fact that Saxton impressed him with a sense of something that was more than just business. As Judge Burnes said: "I don't know why, but he makes me think of religion."

The judge was a pillar in the Methodist Church North. And Ed Jones, who was an official in the Methodist Church South, said practically the same thing. As for Banker Winton, Baptist, and Mayor Riley, Congregationalist, they also agreed with Presbyterian Joe Paddock that this newcomer was an unusually fine Christian character, who, even apart from business considerations, would be a real asset to the community. Quite consistently, too, each individual pillar was careful to assure his own particular pastor that Mr. Saxton would be a member well worth having.

As a result of the competition thus engendered Mr. Saxton received attentions not unlike a college fraternity rush. In due time he was even invited to the groceryman's home—*that* was after he had dined with the Jamisons. But, with it all, no one could say that the deservedly popular subject of these special efforts was drawn more to one church than another. He was interested in all; but his interest remained decidedly impersonal.

A month had passed since Mr. Saxton's first appearance in Westover.

Georgia Paddock was in the living room, that afternoon, reading *Life* and waiting for Jack Ellory to pick her up on his way to the country club.

She looked at the clock. A quarter past four. If Jack expected to play much tennis he'd better be coming along. Father would be home from the store presently. Mother had been out since just before lunch. Oh, darn! Why couldn't mother at *least* manage to be around the house when dad got home at the end of the day?

The girl tossed her magazine fretfully aside and wandered uneasily out to the front porch. She was just in time to see an

automobile stopping in front of the house. The car was an expensive roadster, one of those machines which, more than any other piece of property, advertises its owner's excessive material wealth. Any one would have known that the man at the wheel was the owner. Fat, florid, forty, he was dressed in keeping with his car—not loud, but with a shade *too much* good taste.

The face of the groceryman's daughter set and her eyes were hard as she saw her mother step from the car and stand as if continuing a most interesting conversation with the gentleman who had brought her home. With an angry swing the girl fled into the house where she was not above watching the little scene from one of her living room windows.

When the shining roadster finally moved on with its radiant owner, Mrs. Paddock came up the walk with the step of a woman half her age. There was color in her cheeks, her eyes were bright, and a faint smile lingered on her lips as if her mind dwelt on pleasant thoughts. As she entered the living room and met her daughter's level gaze of cool and knowing appraisal the color in her cheeks deepened. At the moment, one might easily have thought her an older sister to the girl, and Georgia, always proud of her mother's beauty, paid her the tribute of involuntary admiration, while the stern judgment in the daughter's eyes gave way to a look of troubled affection.

Mrs. Paddock spoke with nervous excitement. "Oh, Georgia, my dear, I *do* wish you had been at the club this afternoon. My program was *such* a success. Mr. Astell was *wonderful*. His address on the 'Courage of Realism' was simply *marvelous*, quite the most *exquisite* thing I ever heard. As Mrs. Brownell said, when she congratulated me on my

program, 'We are *so* fortunate in having a man of Edward Alton Astell's culture living right here in Westover!' " She glanced at the clock. "My goodness, I did not dream it was so late."

Georgia said dryly: "You held an unusually long session to-day—the club I mean."

Mrs. Paddock missed it. "Your father is not home yet, is he?"

The girl smiled. "No, he's just a *little* late. There he is now—no, it's Jack. Good-by, Mother, I'm off."

"Good-by, dear. The country club, I suppose?"

"Yes—tennis."

The mother's voice was vaguely troubled. "And after that? Oh, Georgia, do be careful. The girls of your age these days —"

The daughter interrupted with a mocking laugh:

"You should worry, Mother dear—you should worry!"

"Now what," thought Mrs. Paddock, as the girl ran lightly from the house, "did Georgia mean by that?" And Georgia's mother moved restlessly about the living room which was so filled with the memories of all her married years. Every piece of furniture, every ornament, picture, book, the very rugs on the floor and the paper on the walls, were associated with some home-making incident, some domestic joy, sorrow, disappointment or achievement. There was a little of the wife and mother soul in everything. Husband and daughter and the baby son who had stayed so short a time—they were always there in that room.

Mrs. Paddock paused before the painting which was the sole relic of her interest in art. She never looked at that

picture without thinking, “If I had only gone on with my studies I might have won a place among the people who are known.” And she would see as in a vision a studio, like the studios of famous painters that she had read about in illustrated magazines. She would see great galleries with throngs of people viewing the work of her brush. She would see the Sunday papers with pages devoted to her life and her art—with reproductions of her pictures, and photographs of herself. Seating herself at the piano she dreamily touched the keys and thought, “If I had continued with my music I would now be at the height of my fame.” And she visioned herself playing to vast audiences in the great cities of the world, being honored by royalty, her picture on the billboards, her name in electric lights, and pages and pages in the newspapers and magazines about her career. She turned from the piano and her restless glance fell upon a row of books. If only she had kept up her work along social welfare, economics or political lines. And she saw herself the center of public interest, lecturing to crowded houses, leading important movements, discussing great issues, a representative in Congress, a famous authority featured in the magazines and headlined in the daily papers. Her thoughts turned to the novel she was writing and she visioned the finished book, with her name—*her* name on the cover, her name in the advertisements everywhere—the reviews, the praise, the articles about her in the magazines, her photograph in the papers. She *must*—she *would* make it all come true. And all the while she was hearing her daughter’s mocking voice: “You should worry, Mother dear—you should worry.” Should she really worry?

What did Georgia mean? What should Laura Louise Paddock—wife and mother—worry about?

When the groceryman reached home a half hour later he found his wife in their bedroom. She was seated before her dressing table and greeted him without turning her head: “You know we are going to the Wintons’ for dinner to-night, Joe.”

“Gosh, I *had* forgotten,” he returned. “But there’s lots of time. We don’t need to start for a couple of hours yet.”

He stood just inside the door looking at her thoughtfully. He was wishing she would turn away from her own image in the glass and come to him. He could see her face in the mirror. She did not even look at him. She was looking at herself. He crossed the room and, stooping, kissed her bare shoulder. She gave no sign that she knew he was there.

Joe spoke to the face in the mirror: “Have you had a good day, dear?”

Her eyes met his for an instant, then with an indifferent shrug she continued doing things to her hair.

The groceryman, with what might have been a sigh, dropped wearily into a chair.

“Where is Georgia?” he asked presently.

Mrs. Paddock’s answer sounded like an accusation. “She is at the country club with Jack Ellory, I suppose. She *said* she was going there. Where they will go between now and midnight, goodness knows. I think the way girls like Georgia go to all sorts of questionable places, with any man who will take them, is perfectly dreadful.”

“I know it is, Laura. Nothing seems to faze this younger generation. I wish”—he paused as if he could not express exactly what it was that he wished—then he said

reassuringly: “Georgia is safe enough with Jack though. Why, they’ve been playmates all their lives.”

“Exactly. But you don’t seem to realize how easy it would be for them to be something more than playmates.”

“You mean they might marry?”

“That or something worse.”

“You seem to have a lot of confidence in your daughter, I must say.”

“Oh, Joe! How *can* one have confidence in anybody these days? Think of Marjory Jones! Everybody knows the *real* cause of her death! And Maud Riley—away on a *visit*. How would you like for *our* daughter to go away on that kind of a visit?”

When the groceryman replied, his voice was not as confident as his words. “She’s all right as long as she is with Jack, Laura. Jack is a mighty fine chap—really—and you know how fond he has always been of Georgia. I admit, though, I wish they would marry and settle down and have done with it.”

“Joe Paddock! Would you actually be satisfied to have our daughter married to *him*?”

“Why not? Everybody says Jack is one of our most promising young business men. He’s bound to be a big man some day. There is no better family than his in Westover. And he’s a lot steadier than most of the men of his age. Look at Henry Winton’s boy, Harry, for instance. And those two Burnes boys—I’m darned if I see how the Judge ever gets a night’s sleep. Jack may chase around some and enjoy a good time occasionally, but you bet your life he is wise enough not

to let it interfere with his business! That boy keeps his head working all the time.”

“That may all be true, but I have heard some things just the same. He doesn’t share all his good times with Georgia—I *hope*. But even if you are right, after all, what *is* he? The automobile business! Could anything be more deadly commonplace? Unless it was the grocery business. I want my daughter to have some sort of a future, a future worth while, I want her to get something out of life—to *be* somebody.”

The groceryman slumped down in his chair. With a retort on his lips he thought: “What’s the use?” and remained silent. Presently he stole a look at his wife as she stood, now, before the long mirror in the door of their bathroom. Keenly alive to her beauty, he thought of their courtship days in the country and how, for her, he had given up the farm life that he loved and had moved to the city.

When Mrs. Paddock had given the last final pat and twitch to her dress and the last lingering touch to her hair she went to a small desk in one corner of the room, and from a little pile of monthly statements selected a single sheet.

“Joe,” she said in a cool, competent tone, “I wish you would instruct your clerks to be more careful. Look at this.” She handed the statement to her husband.

Joe glanced at the printed form with the itemized entries. “Well, what’s the matter with it? It’s the regular monthly statement of our account at the store. Have you checked it with the sales slips?”

“Certainly I have checked it. That is how I know it is wrong. None of those entries which I have marked were delivered to us. I am very careful to have cook save every

slip and, besides, I know what I order. Some one is charging to you groceries which we never received.”

For some time the groceryman’s eyes were fixed on the statement as if he were studying the problem. Then returning the paper to his wife he said: “It’s all right, Laura—Davie Bates got these groceries. I told Bill to charge them to me but to keep the account separate from our house account. The fool has mixed things up, as usual.”

But in spite of his effort to appear at ease, the groceryman exhibited all the symptoms of a schoolboy called unexpectedly to account by his teacher. Mrs. Paddock’s lips curved in a little smile which her husband, whose eyes were downcast, did not see.

“So *you* are taking care of that wretched Bates family, are you?”

“It doesn’t amount to anything, Laura—And they are terribly up against it. Dave, you know, has been a helpless cripple for two years, and now Mary is down in bed. They haven’t a cent except what little Davie earns and there are two other kids younger than he. I don’t see why our church can’t do something for them. The man was giving his work to us when he was hurt. I tried to put it up to the board at our last meeting but they wouldn’t even listen to me.”

“Our church, Joe,” said Mrs. Paddock thoughtfully, “needs more money for its own work, right now, than we can possibly raise. With the Congregationalists completing their beautiful new building only a block away, and the Methodists putting in that wonderful new pipe organ, and the Baptists adding that new wing with those lovely social parlors, I’m ashamed to be seen going to our services. We simply *must* do something!”

“That’s what our board said,” returned Joe, gloomily.

“Why don’t the Organized Charities take up the case?” asked Mrs. Paddock.

“They can’t. They haven’t anywhere near funds enough to meet all the charity needs of the city, and because Davie has a job they say the case is not desperate. By the way, Laura, I spent some time this afternoon with Mr. Saxton.”

“Yes?”

“I took him out to see that tract of ours on the east side. I’m almost sure he has made up his mind to locate in Westover. If I could only sell him that land you could have your new house and your big car with a chauffeur and go to New York and abroad with Mrs. Jamison and the best of them.”

“Oh, Joe! Is there *really* a chance?” She moved quickly behind her husband’s chair; two cool arms encircled the groceryman’s neck; a perfunctory kiss dropped on the groceryman’s bald spot, and a gentle voice soothed the groceryman’s troubled heart. “Joe, you are the dearest, kindest man in all the world.”

The groceryman and his wife were quite happy that evening with the little group of their most intimate friends who met at the Wintons’ home. The Judge Burneses were there and the Ed Joneses and the Mayor Rileys, and the fact that each family represented a different church in no way marred the pleasures of the occasion, which, of course, was exactly as it should have been. Joe Paddock, himself, was in unusually good spirits. Whether it was the good company or the excellent cocktails and wines (Banker Winton enjoyed the luxury of a most competent bootlegger) or whether it was

because his wife was in a kindly mood, Joe could not have said. He only knew that he, as he would have expressed it, was feeling fine—*fine*.

It was nearly twelve o'clock. The party was at its best, when, in a distant part of the city, the poorest and most squalid section, the clanging bell of an ambulance rang through the darkness of the night and Davie Bates started from his sleep.

The place called home by the Bates family was a three-room shack of unpainted boards and a roof that leaked. The neighboring homes were of similar construction, which gave that quarter of Westover its local name of "Shack Town." Here and there a house gave shabby evidence of having once been painted, but these feeble attempts at decency were so ancient that the improvement had long since become questionable. There were a few families that, with good reason, held themselves superior to the prevailing tone of the community. Their roofs did not leak.

Davie's father slept in the room where Davie had his own rickety old cot. Every morning the delivery boy half carried the helpless carpenter from his bed to an old rocking chair, every night he half carried his father back again from the chair to the bed.

The sound of the passing ambulance died quickly away. Seated on the edge of his cot, Davie listened. From the sound of heavy breathing he knew that his father was asleep. The two younger children occupied a bed in the kitchen. Davie tiptoed to the door. The little ones were safe in slumber land. Stealing quietly to the door of the only remaining room, the delivery boy paused a moment on the threshold, then crept

softly to the side of his mother's bed. The form under the ragged coverlid stirred. A skeleton-like hand reached out.

“Do you want anything, Mother?” Davie whispered anxiously.

“Oh, Davie, dear, I was having such a beautiful dream! We were all back in the country—the woods and orchards and flowers and birds—and fields of corn all tasseled out—and wheat and oats and meadow grass waving in the wind. And everything was so fresh and shining and clean—like—like it is in the country when the sun shines out after a summer shower. There was a creek, too, and the water was clear and sparkly. And all the houses were white and clean and not crowded close together but scattered here and there among the green trees and fields. Oh, Davie, it was so beautiful! And your father was well and strong like he used to be, and I wasn't sick, and Jimmie and Maud were so clean and neat and rosy-cheeked and happy, and you with the books you love. And our house seemed to be on a hill like—under some big trees, and not very far across a little valley there was a white church and while we were all there together waiting, the church bell rang—and I woke up—”

“ 'Twas that damned ambulance bell,” muttered the delivery boy, under his breath, so that his mother could not hear.

“But, Davie boy, I must not keep you from your sleep—Go back to bed, son, you need your rest.”

“Can't I do something for you, Mother? Don't you want a drink?”

“No, dear, there is nothing. It was such a lovely dream. Kiss me now and run along.”

The delivery boy was going softly from the room when the sound of his mother's low, weak voice came again, and he paused just outside the open door. Standing there in the darkness he heard:

“Dear God, our Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy wondrous kindness, for a husband's love, for the children Thou hast given me, for the roof that shelters us, and for our daily bread. I praise Thy name in thankfulness, oh God, for the church and its ministries, and for the blessed gospel of Jesus—As our Lord taught us to ask of Thee, our Father, I pray, oh God, give my dear husband strength to bear his affliction, and if it be Thy will make him well. Safeguard my little ones, oh God—They have no place to play but in the streets, and no one to watch over them through the long day—In Thy infinite mercy keep them safe from harm. Bless all the churches and the pastors who labor in Thy vineyard and grant that from their toil and sacrifice they may reap a mighty harvest of souls. And, dear God, be very close to my boy, Davie. Keep him strong and well. Make him honest and upright; give him a clean mind and a kind heart; guard him from every temptation. And Thine shall be the honor and the glory and the praise forever. In the name of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Amen.”

The delivery boy, lying on his cot, gazed with wide eyes into the darkness of the night. *He* did not pray. He considered ways and means by which he might possibly bring an answer to his mother's prayer. That is, he considered how parts of her prayer might be answered. He was not much concerned about the answer to her prayers for the churches and the ministry. And if some of the ways and means considered by Davie were lawless it was only because, for him, there were no

ways and means within the law. Beside Davie's devotion to his mother, the law was a little thing. Beside the desperate need of the delivery boy's family, the salvation of souls seemed of little importance.

When the groceryman and his wife said "good night" to the Wintons and their friends they fervently expressed their appreciation of the pleasant evening which they had so heartily enjoyed. But somewhere between the banker's residence and the Paddock home the happy spirit of the occasion deserted them. By the time Joe had unlocked and opened the front door they were as joyful as two people paying a visit to the family tomb.

When the daughter of the house came in an hour later the groceryman was alone in the living room.

"Why, Daddy, what's the matter?" cried Georgia from the doorway.

"Nothing," returned Joe, laying aside the church paper which he had not been reading.

"But don't you know that it is hours past your bedtime?"

"Is it?"

The girl came into the room and stood looking down at her father with an expression half smiling, half anxious. "Daddy, I believe you have actually been sitting up here alone waiting for me!"

"Well, why not? You—you don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, how funny!" laughed the girl.

The groceryman tried to smile but failed miserably.

Instantly, she was serious. "Surely you were not worried about me, Daddy? I was with Jack. Didn't mother tell you?"

She dropped into the chair with an air of being quite willing to talk frankly about whatever it was that troubled him.

At this her father smiled successfully. "I knew you were all right, of course, dear." Then he continued soberly, almost as if in apology: "It was rather late when your mother and I came home from the Wintons' and when you were not here I got to thinking about you, Marjory Jones, and Maud Riley, and Harry Winton, and Judge Burnes's boys, and—well—"

Georgia gazed thoughtfully at the toe of her slipper. "Jack and I went to the club. We nearly always play tennis on Thursdays, you know. Then we had dinner at Tony's and after that went out to the Sundown Inn. Our crowd was there and we danced."

"I suppose you know, Georgia, that both Tony's and Sundown Inn are likely to be raided any night?"

"Yes, and they have just as good reason for raiding a lot of the parties that are pulled in the best homes in Westover," retorted the girl indignantly. A moment later she added, with characteristic frankness, "I know you are right, Daddy, they are not decent places. All sorts of people go there—fast women and sports—even women from the red-light district—but what is a girl to do? All of my crowd—the bunch I have run with all my life, go. We try not to mix with the others more than we can help, but I'll admit we do get a little gay sometimes—Harry Winton is a beast. But gee! I can't cut all my friends and settle down for an old maid future just yet!"

"I would trust you with Jack anywhere," said the groceryman helplessly.

The girl answered bitterly: "Of course *you* would. And I—I wouldn't trust *any* man anywhere. There's one thing I like Jack for, though," she continued, "no matter how wild the

others get *he* never loses *his* head—he always knows exactly what he’s doing. Sometimes I think he knows too darned well what he’s doing—I don’t believe there is a woman in the world that *he* would trust.”

“Why, Georgia, I thought—that is—I have sort of halfway had the idea that you and Jack—”

She laughed recklessly. “Forget it, Dad, forget it. We know too much about each other. I used to think—but never mind *that*. Homes like Grandma and Grandpa Paddock’s are all out of date, Dad. None of the girls I know ever think of such a home. We don’t marry to make homes any more, we marry for fun—because we want to be married. When it comes to that, why should we want homes? Good gosh! look at the homes in which most of us were born! Are our respected parents so wonderfully happy in their married state these days? I’ll tell the world they are not!”

The groceryman, watching his daughter’s face, tried to speak lightly. “Oh, I guess there are a few people left in the world who are happy though married.”

To which the girl retorted: “Sure there are. But I am farmer enough to know that when you size up a field of corn you don’t pick out a few individual hills that happen to be Class A. I’m talking about the present-day human crop, as a whole, Daddy dear, and I must admit that we don’t look very promising. By the way, Dad, do you know that Astell man very well?”

“Who, Edward Astell? Yes, I know him—that is, I have met him a few times—why?”

“Oh, nothing—only he is considered to be the one grand prize catch of Westover.”

“I suppose so, but what of it?”

“Well, he was at the Sundown Inn to-night with that she-sport, Mrs. Valdmire. They were both more than loaded.”

“That doesn’t concern me, Georgia. I’m not interested in Astell and his women. I’m interested in my daughter and her friends and her future.”

“I understand, Daddy. I only mentioned Astell because—well—because you see, there’s not a dear mama of our acquaintance who wouldn’t give a leg to have her daughter married to the beast. And then you all wonder why the girls of to-day don’t look upon marriage as something holy and sacred. Daddy, dear, you are a lot too good and trusting for us moderns. You really should have stayed on the farm like grandpa and grandma.”

“Young people certainly have a lot more freedom now than they did in my day,” murmured Joe.

“Freedom!” cried the girl, “freedom! Huh! We brag about it a lot but that’s all bunk. There is no such thing as freedom. We do what we *have* to do—what we are *expected* to do, exactly as the young people of your day did. If our ideas and ideals and standards and customs are different it’s because our fathers and mothers have changed theirs.”

The groceryman was studying his daughter with a puzzled expression as if he were mentally groping for some half-revealed truth.

“When your mother and I were your age,” he said slowly, “nearly every one in our crowd was interested in the Church. We all attended church services as a matter of course.” He paused doubtfully and his daughter smiled much as a kindly scientist might smile at the quaint observations of a child. But the groceryman was either too dense or too occupied with his mental effort to get hold of that shadowy truth to notice. “You

and Jack are both members of the Church,” he continued. “You used to be active in the Christian Endeavor work.”

The girl rose quickly and went to sit on the arm of his chair. “Oh, Daddy dear, don’t make me laugh! You are *so* old-fashioned, and I love you for it. But for Jack and me and our crowd the Church is simply impossible. It just doesn’t fit into our lives anywhere. You and mother, when you were young, didn’t believe in all the old church stuff—like witchcraft, for instance—that your great-grandparents had to swallow when they were boys and girls—did you?”

“No, of course we didn’t.”

“Well, then, what right has the Church to expect *my* generation to hang on to all the denominational bunk that you and mother, when you were young, took from your preachers as the one and only simon pure, eighteen carat, A-1 religion?”

“W-e-ll—” said the groceryman.

“As a matter of fact, Daddy dear, you don’t believe half that’s in our church creed yourself. And you know darned well that you don’t really get any kick out of the antediluvian drivel that Parson Coleman calls a sermon. Why, if that reverend fraud should happen to have a real honest-to-goodness thought he wouldn’t dare mention it for fear some of his denominational bosses might hear about it and fire him. It’s just as Jack says, ‘Our preachers don’t *preach*—they just stand up there and dodge—like the poor cuss in the street fair who sticks his head through a hole and lets people throw at him for so much a shot.’ ”

“Oh—come now, Georgia.”

“It’s so, Daddy—why, just let me tell you—One evening about a month ago Jack and I tried to go to church. Do you

know what happened? Well, it was like this—you see I got to thinking that it might be better for us if we were to slow down a little, and after Jack and I had talked it over like we do most everything, we decided we'd try it. We didn't want to go to church for *fun*, Dad, we weren't hunting amusement, we honestly wanted to hear a good, straight, religious sermon because—well—because way down deep inside we were both feeling that way.

“First, we naturally went to our own church. It was the night that woman missionary gave her illustrated lecture on China—you remember. It was good stuff, I suppose. I guess she knew what she was going to talk about. But information about China didn't seem to be what Jack and I wanted, so we went over to the church on the next corner. There was a distinguished agriculturist there who was going to talk about the Philippines, with pictures, of course. The speaker didn't even pretend that he was going to preach. The Philippines didn't appeal to us, so we went on a few blocks to another place of worship, and there the preacher was just beginning a review of the latest popular novel. We had both read the book so we beat it to a church farther down the street and, Dad, we ran slap into the dinkiest sort of a picture show. Oh, they were Bible pictures, all right, all about the Holy Land, with tombs and camels and donkeys and everything. And the reverend D.D.—a great big good-looker he is, too, with all his university and football and theological seminary training—was going to explain the pictures—so we could tell the difference between the camels and the donkeys, I suppose. *That* finished us. We sneaked out and went down town to a real movie house where we saw ‘Flaming Youth.’ Jack said it was no wonder youth flamed, and we have never tried to spend an evening in a house of God since.”

Joe's arm was around his daughter and he gave her a little hug. "Georgia, dear, will you tell me something?"

"Sure, Daddy, anything you want to know."

"It's about Jack."

"All right, what about him?"

The girl's utter frankness touched her father's heart and gave him such confidence that he changed the form of his question to: "Do you love Jack, Georgia?"

"What do you mean by love, Daddy? Can two people who don't trust each other really love?"

"Not the kind of love I mean, Georgia."

"That's what I thought. Well, I can tell you one thing for sure—no matter how much I loved Jack Ellory I wouldn't dare marry him—and I suspect he feels exactly that way about me. I don't believe a single one of the girls of my set who has married ever really trusted her man. She only thought maybe she could somehow manage to hold him. I don't care for any of that in mine, thank you. Nice situation, isn't it, Daddy? So full of promise for the future—and all that!"

She suddenly released herself from his arm. "Good night now, Daddy. It's really late. You should have been in bed hours ago." She stooped and kissed him. "And please don't worry about me. I can take care of myself. I think a lot about religion—I really do—and so does Jack. We talk about it a lot too. But what is that old line, 'Youth will be served'? You pull that on your preacher and see if he can find anything in it."

When she was gone the groceryman sat very still. He was not mistaken—he *could* not be mistaken—when his daughter

kissed him he had caught the unmistakable odor of liquor. Slowly he arose and, crossing the room, he stood before the picture of Jesus which hung above the radio. For a long time he gazed upon the countenance of the Great Teacher.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FARM

THE Paddock farm was eight miles west of town on the state highway. Grandpa and Grandma Paddock had settled in the new county of Westover the year they were married, coming with other adventurous families in covered wagons from the more crowded districts farther east. Their first home was a log cabin down by the spring at the foot of the hill. Their first crops were planted among the stumps of the newly cleared lands in fields fenced with brush and rails. Westover was a general store, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, a gristmill, and five houses. The post office, with mail by stage every two weeks, was in the store. The highway was two deep rutted wheel tracks wandering erratically through the forest, fording the creeks, and climbing laboriously over the hills.

The farmhouse, which was built the year Joe was born, stood on the brow of a long, low hill overlooking the broad, gently rolling fields, the meadow lands and pastures of the Paddock acres and the neighboring farms from which the stumps and the primitive brush fences had long since disappeared. From the kitchen door one looked across the garden to the orchard. Beyond the orchard a cornfield extended along the crest of the ridge to the woods which rose gently to the highest point of the hill.

Grandpa Paddock was a lover of trees, and so he had retained not only this bit of the virgin forest but here and there over the entire farm were beautiful individuals which he

had saved from the ax. Some were old giants of the original army which occupied the land before the day of the conquering white man. Others were the children of that ancient race. The house itself, placed well back from the road, was guarded by a goodly company of these gnarled and leafy old warriors whose protecting arms defied the impudent irreverence of the modern state highway and thus preserved, in a world of restless change and ill-considered hurry, an atmosphere of old-time peace and quiet. A two-story frame, with wide verandas on two sides, white with green shutters, a shingled roof grayed by the weather and the lichens, and honeysuckles and climbing roses and morning-glories—it was something more than just a house to rent or to sell. It was never a mere residence for a swiftly passing year or two. It was a home to be born in—to live in—to die in. Even the big red barn seemed to have gathered the surrounding smaller buildings to its protecting wings like a mighty mother watching over her brood.

For nearly fifty years this house had shared the most intimate joys and sorrows of the man and woman who together planned and built it. For nearly half a century this husband and wife, this father and mother, had enriched this home with their deepest and most sacred experiences, and glorified it with their steadfast love. To these walls they had confided all their secret hopes and fears, all their trials and triumphs—their struggles, their victories, their temptations, their defeats. In these rooms their children were begotten and born. In these rooms their little ones had been nursed, had learned to laugh and cry, to talk and walk. In these rooms they had watched two sons and a daughter die. The house, the trees, and the man and woman had grown old together, but as their fields were ever young with the new life of each

springtime, so the hearts of Grandpa and Grandma Paddock were young.

In the early morning, following that night when the groceryman and his daughter talked together, Grandpa Paddock came out from the house to see the new day. Standing on the veranda he viewed the countryside, looked at his trees, studied the sky, felt the early morning air, and heard the familiar voices of the farm. And Grandpa, himself, was like a tree. His old trunk and limbs, though gnarled and roughened by the marks of many storms, were still sturdy and strong. There was sunlight in his eyes, and kindly shadows in his face. There was the sheen of shining leaves on his white hair, and in his voice there was the sound of the gentle breeze.

Grandma joined him a minute or two later and standing close by his side remarked on the beauty of the morning with an enjoyment not in the least dulled by nearly eighty years of mornings. Then she went to look into the family affairs of a pair of wrens who, having nested in the honeysuckle vines, were “expecting.” Grandma Paddock was one of those women (God give us more of them) who manage to carry the everyday burdens of wifedom and motherhood as if they were treasures beyond price, and so inevitably the accumulated experiences of her years made the last of her life the richest and the best. All that she had lived she still possessed, but that which had been crude was refined—that which had been raw was softened; all that once was new had gained the flavor and the mellowness that comes with time.

The farmhouse bell, outside the kitchen door, rang. They saw the hired man, Henry, coming from the barn with his

pails of milk. Henry had been with them twenty years. The other hands, with their families, lived in two cottages under the hill. Arm and arm they went into the house.

Grandpa found his “specs,” took the big family Bible from its place of honor on the center table in the sitting room and, seating himself in his old armchair, reverently opened the book. Grandma, in her favorite rocker by the window, rocked gently and looked out and away across the fields, and if the dear old lady’s thoughts strayed from the moment into the years that were gone it was with no irreverence. Hetty came from the kitchen rolling her bare arms in her apron. Hetty had been grandma’s “girl” for nearly forty years. Then Henry found a seat on the edge of the chair nearest the dining-room door. Dandy, the collie dog, walked sedately to grandpa’s side and the house cat, Peter, arched his back and rubbed against Henry’s boots, favored Hetty with purring attention, and crossed the room to settle down in grandma’s lap.

Slowly and reverently grandpa read the morning lesson, his kindly voice caressing every word. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” The quiet was broken by the raucous shriek of an automobile that, with wide open exhaust, thundered along the state highway at seventy miles an hour.... “And learn of me for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

The prayer which followed, while the members of the household knelt beside their chairs, was as unpretentious as their lives. As the grain in the fields, the grass in the meadows and the mighty trees looked to heaven for the needed sunshine and rain, so this old-fashioned household, without show or ceremony, looked to God for their daily need.

Then they all went in to breakfast.

The groceryman was not surprised that morning when his daughter appeared at his office in the store and begged him to go with her to the farm. The groceryman, himself, was feeling the need of something which he never failed to find at his old home in the country. He never realized what it was that he wanted, or what it was that he always, without fail, received. He only knew that at certain times—when life drove him with such pitiless haste that he became confused and distracted—the farm called to him as a well of water calls to one who thirsts.

“Perhaps mother would like to go too,” he said, and before Georgia could reply called for the house number on the telephone.

The girl watched him while he was hearing from Ella that Mrs. Paddock was not in. He hung up the receiver and for almost a minute sat as if lost in thought, his hand still on the instrument.

“Mother has a luncheon engagement,” said Georgia. “I heard her telephoning about it to some one just before I left the house. They are to call for her. That’s how I knew we could have the car. Come on, Daddy, let’s go. If I don’t get away from this town right now I shall scream.”

They exchanged scarcely a word until, as they reached the crest of the hill in front of the house, the girl, drawing a full, deep breath, exclaimed: “Oh, Daddy, look! How beautiful! Everything is so—so *clean*.”

It was strange that the groceryman’s daughter should have used the same word that the delivery boy’s mother had repeated so often in telling Davie of her dream.

The collie welcomed them joyously; Hetty started for the barnyard to tell Henry to kill a chicken; grandpa came from the orchard and grandma appeared on the veranda.

“Hello.”

“Howdy.”

“How’s everything?”

“Time you was coming.”

“Haven’t seen you for a coon’s age.”

“Where’s Laura?”

“Why didn’t she come too?”

They sat on the veranda, “just visiting,” as grandma would have said, until Hetty came to tell them dinner was ready. But when the midday meal was over Georgia must go with grandpa to see the bran’ new colt, the baby pigs, and the week-old calf whose mother took the premium at the last fair and whose father was a grand champion.

When grandma and her son were alone the old lady, with no preliminary verbal skirmish, asked gently: “What’s the trouble, my boy?”

“Oh, nothing,” said Joe.

“Business going pretty well?”

“Well enough—first rate in fact.”

“That’s good, but of course it would ’cause you’ll always do *your* part and the folks are just bound to eat. Your father was saying last night your grocery business ain’t like those stores that sell nothing but luxuries. I told him that was all right as far as it went but sometimes people got their necessities and their luxuries so mixed that they couldn’t tell which was which. What is Laura busying herself with these days?”

“Oh, she has her clubs and social duties.”

“That’s nice. Laura takes a lot of comfort in such things. I’ve often had a notion that I’d like to join a club or something. Your father and I thought we saw her go past in an automobile day before yesterday, but we decided it couldn’t ’a’ been her ’cause Laura would never ’a’ gone right by without even waving to us and she wouldn’t ’a’ been riding along with a man in a roadster, neither.”

Grandma watched Joe’s hands as he cut the end from a cigar and searched every pocket in his clothing, except the right one, for a match.

“What’s the matter with Georgia, Joe?”

“What makes you think there is anything the matter with her, Mother?”

“ ’Cause there *is*. Is she in love?”

“I don’t know.”

“What does Laura think about it?”

“I don’t know that either.”

“Well, son, you and Laura had better be finding out, ’cause there is nothing more important that can happen to the child. If she *ain’t* in love it’s time she was. For a girl her age there’s only one thing worse than being in love, and that’s not being. She and Jack Ellory come out here every now and then. Jack’s a fine boy—no better bred lad in Westover County. And, if my old eyes ain’t fooling me, they think a lot of each other. They always have as I remember. It’s against nature, son, that they should go as far as they have and not go farther. It’s time they was making up their minds to marry or quit.”

And then grandma made one of her characteristic observations which at the moment seemed to have no bearing

upon the topic of the conversation, but was sometimes found, later, to be the root of the whole matter: “It takes a lot of religion, son, for two people to love and marry and live together long enough to raise children and be grandparents.”

Joe rose hurriedly. “Father and Georgia are coming yonder. If you don’t mind, Mother, I’ll slip away for a little while—I want to go for a walk.”

He went quickly through the house and out by the kitchen door, swiftly crossed the garden to the orchard, hurried on under the trees and climbing the fence made his way through the cornfield toward the woods. Any one watching his movements might easily have thought him a fugitive from the law. Indeed, the groceryman, himself, felt that he was trying to escape, that he *must* escape from—what?

But having gained the cover of the woods he moved with less haste. The cool and shadowy quiet closed about him as if an unseen hand had drawn a curtain to shut out the noisy troubled world. The column-like trunks of the great trees defined dim, temple aisles and corridors that led to distant mysteries, while overhead their mighty limbs, like cathedral arches, supported the roof of shimmering leaves. Here and there, through windows screened by fretwork of twigs and branches, the sunlight streamed in shafts of gold upon the living green of wall and floor. The carpet of moss and fern yielded kindly to his feet. He felt a solemn presence.

Instinctively he uncovered his head and moved softly. The sweet, earthy fragrance, the songs of birds, the murmur of the gentle wind in the tree tops, and the soft rustle of leaves were as the incense, the music, and the prayers of a religious service. Somewhere near, before an unseen altar, true priests were worshipping a living God.

And then, almost before he realized where he was, the groceryman was sitting under an old tree on the bank of a pond which lay in a little hollow in the very heart of the woods. From his earliest childhood that spot had been to Joe Paddock a place of refuge—a retreat, a sanctuary. That ancient tree, with its branches overhanging the still amber water of the leafy pool, had always shared his secret troubles, and helped him in those spiritual and emotional experiences which every boy and man must undergo without help from his fellows. It had witnessed his decisions and been the confidant of his most precious dreams. It had heard his faltering declaration of love to his girl neighbor and schoolmate, and had seen the kiss which sealed their betrothal. Here, if anywhere, the groceryman felt that he could find himself. Here he might glimpse a way through the confusing fog that enveloped him. Here, if anywhere, he might hope to feel the presence of his God.

There are few of us, I think, for whom there is not somewhere a place that is sacred. But rarely in these restless, modern times is one privileged to go to his spot of holy ground.

When the groceryman left the woods an hour or two later he was still depressed by that feeling of impending evil. Returning by the lane which led to the barnyard he saw another automobile parked with his own machine near the house. From the barnyard gate he saw a stranger sitting on the veranda with his father and mother and daughter. And then as he drew nearer he discovered to his amazement that the fourth member of the group was John Saxton.

Grandpa was about to introduce Joe to Mr. Saxton when that gentleman said with a laugh: “Oh, but your son and I are already very good friends, Mr. Paddock.” And then, as he shook hands with the groceryman, he added, still smiling: “I certainly chose the right day to call upon your father and mother. To find *three* generations at home is rather better luck than I hoped for.”

“Joe,” cried grandma, eager as a child, “did you know that Mr. Saxton is a friend of Dan Matthews? You remember how often you have heard us talk about Dan Matthews, the big mining man who used to preach in Corinth where your Aunt Nellie lived, and your cousin John Gardner and Mary, his wife?”

“Yes, Mother, I know who Dan Matthews is, of course, but I—” He looked inquiringly at Mr. Saxton, “and you are really representing the Matthews interests?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’ll be hanged!”

They all laughed at the groceryman’s expression.

Saxton explained: “When Mr. Matthews sent me to Westover he told me to be sure and call on your father and mother. I wanted to come long before this,” he continued to grandpa and grandma, “but circumstances have prevented.”

The groceryman understood as clearly as if the man had spoken the words, that for some reason this representative of Dan Matthews had wished to become acquainted with *him* before making himself known to his parents.

Big Dan had said to his confidential agent, before leaving him at his hotel that night in Kansas City, “John, I want you to know the Paddocks—the old people, I mean. They will

show you how the Christian religion worked in a typical American home of the last generation. I shall be surprised if you do not find their son mighty helpful when the time comes.”

In the hour that followed grandma told once more the story of her visit to her sister Nellie on the Gardner farm near Corinth when Dan Matthews was pastor of the Memorial Church. She had first seen Big Dan that day when the minister walked out from town to work with Nellie’s son John, in the harvest field. The Gardners were members of Dan’s church. The incident of the harvesting contest between the young farmer and his pastor had resulted in a close friendship between the two men. So Grandma Paddock came to know all about the trouble in the Corinth church—how the minister had befriended crippled Denny and his mother, the tragedy of Grace Connor’s life, and how Big Dan had met and loved Hope Farwell who became his wife.

Joe Paddock had heard the story many times for grandma, confirmed hero worshiper that she was, never missed an opportunity to tell it, but he listened now with new and excited interest.

Mr. Saxton, in his turn, answering their many questions told them of his employer’s home and family—of his activities in the church and his generous contributions to every good cause. But of his mission in Westover Dan Matthews’ confidential agent did not speak.

And all the while the groceryman was thinking what this financially powerful mining man’s friendly interest in his family, together with his own well established friendship with the representative of Dan Matthews, might mean to him. Surely *now* he would be given an opportunity to get in on the

ground floor of whatever enterprise Mr. Saxton was sent to inaugurate in Westover. So intent was the groceryman on his own thoughts that he scarcely heard his daughter's comment when Saxton told them of the Matthews' home.

"Is it really true that there are homes like that these days?"

Saxton's grave eyes, with their shadows of sadness, met the girl's frank look. "Are you really such a skeptic, Miss Paddock?"

"How can any one be anything but skeptical?" the girl returned boldly. "Don't you read the papers? Don't you read magazine stories and novels and see plays and pictures? And can't you see what is going on all around you? Your Dan Matthews and his wife may be as happy as you picture them, Mr. Saxton, but if they are, they are decidedly old-fashioned."

Saxton asked gently: "And do you think, then, that for the men and women of this day the happiness of home and family love is impossible?"

The groceryman's daughter answered with a shockingly frank statement of her unwholesome convictions: "The men of this generation don't want wives, Mr. Saxton, they want women. People have forgotten how to love."

"If they have," returned Saxton, "it is because they have forgotten how to worship."

And Georgia, with her eyes fixed on the speaker's countenance, wondered, "Where *have* I seen that face before!"

Grandpa, who was sitting close beside the girl, gently touched her arm.

Grandma said with her quiet smile: "I guess you had better stay out here on the farm for a few days, dearie. You are needing a change and rest."

"I was hoping you would ask me," the girl answered with a troubled laugh. "You won't mind, will you, Father?"

"It will do you good," returned Joe.

Only Georgia had noticed the roadster which passed the house at terrific speed while Mr. Saxton was telling them about the Matthews' home. And the girl with eyes so much younger than the eyes of her grandparents, had seen clearly the man and woman who rode in the expensive machine.

At Joe's suggestion Mr. Saxton sent his car home and returned to town with the groceryman. But when Joe, highly elated over his discovery of the financial interests represented by his friend, tactfully sought further information, Saxton as tactfully told him that he was not at liberty to divulge the nature of Mr. Matthews' contemplated investment in Westover. He asked, too, that for a little while Joe hold what he had learned as confidential. The groceryman, of course, readily agreed.

As Saxton was alighting from the car in front of the Palace, he said: "I am having a few men for dinner, here at the hotel, this coming Thursday evening. I would be delighted if you will come."

CHAPTER IX

MR. SAXTON'S DINNER PARTY

THE more Joe Paddock thought about it the more clearly he saw how fortunate he was in his friendship with Mr. Saxton. Or rather, to be exact, the groceryman saw how his friendship with Mr. Saxton might lead to his good fortune. Joe had a very high regard for Dan Matthews' confidential agent. He was not lacking in sincere appreciation of the man's unusual personality and character. He often spoke to others of his admiration for him. He realized that he always received something from Saxton which he did not receive from any other friend. It was a something, rather vague and indefinite, which he could not have explained but which was nevertheless very real. It steadied and comforted him and gave him hope and courage when he was depressed by that feeling of impending evil. But always, in the back of the groceryman's head, or underneath his thoughts, or deep somewhere inside of him, there was the possibility that out of this friendship might come large material gains. There are so few of us who can worship even God without asking a very material return for our adoration.

The friendship between Joe's parents and Dan Matthews had been for years a matter of pride in the Paddock family. Indeed, it was well on the way of becoming one of those treasured traditions which are to be found in every family. For twenty years or more, Joe had listened to that story of Big Dan's experience in Corinth and had watched his progress from the pulpit of the obscure country town church to his present position of financial power. That this great

millionaire mining man still held memories of his Corinth friends and that his regard for the Paddocks still lived, was proved by Saxton's call at the farm. The groceryman knew the value of right connections in business. Friendship has often been the foundation of a fortune.

Never before had the groceryman looked forward to a dinner party with such eager interest. It was evident, to him, that the event was to be no mere social affair. There were no ladies invited. It was not even mentioned in the social columns of the paper. While it was true that Saxton had accepted invitations to several Westover homes, those occasions had always been without social significance. Dan Matthews' representative, Joe assured himself, was merely taking this way of assembling a few chosen men to whom he would reveal Big Dan's plans for his contemplated enterprise in Westover. As Joe explained to his wife, whatever Dan Matthews was planning to do in Westover, he would want a few local men associated with him. He hoped Saxton would make no mistake in choosing his men. He wondered who were the others invited to the dinner. He wished that Saxton had consulted him.

But with all his interest in the approaching event, the groceryman was very careful not to tell any one, except his wife, of course, that he knew who it was that Saxton represented. And he cautioned Laura, explaining that the value of Dan Matthews' friendship must not be lessened by any betrayal of Saxton's confidence. Nor did he mention the dinner party to any of his friends. He feared that to do so might appear as indiscreet and, in a way, disloyal to Saxton. It is safe to say, too, that the others invited—whoever they were—were looking forward as eagerly as the groceryman

and for exactly the same reasons. Mrs. Paddock, with her mind on New York opera and Paris gowns, was exceedingly gracious to her husband and when the evening arrived helped him to look his best. It is to be supposed that the other wives interested were as helpful to their representatives.

When the groceryman arrived at the Palace and met his fellow guests he knew that Mr. Saxton had made no mistake. Only five men were present but they were the acknowledged leaders of the largest business interests in Westover and, in all civic affairs, the most influential citizens. Intimately associated in matters of finance and friends of long standing, they were the innermost circle of the inner circle. And each man, when he saw the others and noted the limited number of the company, was confirmed in his opinion as to the importance of the occasion. They greeted one another by their given names and, without putting their thoughts into words, managed to congratulate one another and express their common gratification.

Mr. Saxton met them all with a quiet, genial greeting, with no excessive good spirits or overdone cordiality, but with that genuineness which ever marks the perfect host. But to his guests the personality of the man, perhaps because of the very keenness of their interest in the occasion, was even more impressive than usual. They sensed a power back of him. He was as one of authority. Yet they were drawn to him as to a close friend. They felt his strength and were won by his kindness. They admired him for his broad knowledge of men and events, and were charmed by his gentle courtesy. In spite of the prevailing custom at such occasions in Westover, no liquor was served, nor did Mr. Saxton apologize for the omission. Possibly because they needed no stimulant other

than the occasion itself, the guests were not disappointed. On the contrary, each man's confidence in his host was strengthened. In fact, they would have been disappointed had Saxton offered them drink.

The company was soon seated at the table in a private dining room. The usual commonplaces, light laughter, and small talk, passed around the board. But in the mind of every guest the real purpose of the gathering was uppermost. Joe Paddock was thinking of his land which he hoped Dan Matthews would buy, of Laura's ambitions and Georgia's future. Perhaps he could give his daughter a home for her wedding present. He wondered if he could ask Dan Matthews to let Jack Ellory come in with them. Henry Winton was thinking of the building he hoped to erect on his lot at the corner of State and Washington. The ground floor would be leased by the bank. Saxton's company could have offices above. Their business would mean a great deal to the First National. He must try and place Harry with them. George Riley's mind was on the Governorship of the state. With the Saxton interests back of him he could hope. It would mean much to his daughter. Ed Jones, with the help of the Saxton connections, could swing the new subdivision he had planned. A big industrial company would boom the sale of lots and the building of homes. Judge Burnes realized that Saxton's company would need counsel. It might easily be the realization of his wife's dream of a new house on the avenue, and perhaps he might be able to establish the boys in some business that would steady them down.

It was Winton who made the first tentative approach. "Well, Mr. Saxton," he said, with just the right touch of

familiar good fellowship, “how do you like Westover now that you have been with us long enough to get around a little?”

The general conversation died away. Every eye was turned toward the host.

“I like Westover very much, Mr. Winton,” Saxton answered. “The more I see of it the more I am convinced that you have everything with which to create an ideal American city. I must confess, though, I often wonder how many of your taxpayers ever consider the *real* possibilities of Westover.”

The guests glanced at one another with pleased expressions.

Lawyer Burnes followed the banker’s lead: “May we ask, sir, if you are finding here the particular advantages, or perhaps I should say opportunities, for which you are looking?”

Again every eye was upon the gentleman at the head of the table. The silence was significant.

Mr. Saxton smiled. “I’m afraid I can’t answer that, Judge—not just now. I am not yet at liberty to discuss the business which brought me to Westover. As men of affairs you all must recognize the danger of premature announcements.”

A wave of disappointment swept over the company like a chilling draft.

With the evident purpose of tempering the coolness, Saxton continued: “I may say, however, that I am finding everything here most favorable to the enterprise which the interests I represent are contemplating. I can also assure you that this enterprise will be of the greatest value to Westover

and to every one who is in any way interested in the future of this city.”

This at least was *something*. They all felt, from Saxton’s manner, that he was not speaking lightly. They realized they must not press him further. They felt, too, that their host understood their disappointment and sympathized with them. The groceryman was more cheerful than the others because he, alone, knowing who it was that Saxton represented, could gauge the real value of their host’s assurance. He was so elated that he could not resist venturing a knowing smile as he met Saxton’s look of understanding.

Returning the groceryman’s smile, Saxton, with the air of helping the company out of a conversational difficulty, said: “Do you not think, gentlemen, that as men of business—from a purely business point of view, I mean—we often underrate the value of a city’s general character?”

His guests gave him polite attention but were slow to follow.

Smiling, he continued persuasively: “Our friend, Joe Paddock, here, would not pick a cannibal island as a good location for a grocery store.”

They all laughed at this and Mayor Riley said:

“You are right, sir, cities do have character the same as individuals and the civic character of a community is a great factor in its business interests.”

“Personal character,” remarked Judge Burnes, somewhat heavily, “is unquestionably a great asset in any profession or business.”

“We certainly have no use for check raisers and forgers in the First National,” laughed Banker Winton.

The host carried them a step farther with: “And individual character, Judge, is the basis for community character, just as the character of a business of any kind is fixed by the personal characters of those interested in it. For several years now my work has been largely that of finding the right men for the right places, and we have made it our invariable rule that whatever the nature of the position to be filled the first qualification is personal character. And mark you, this is purely a business policy. It is a policy that is recognized in big business everywhere.”

When Mr. Saxton said that his work was to find the right men, his guests did not miss the significance of his remark. They leaned forward in their chairs and looked toward the head of the table with renewed interest.

It was Judge Burnes who said: “Speaking of character, Mr. Saxton, I don’t know whether you are aware of it or not but this gathering here to-night might well be a religious meeting. Joe Paddock is a pillar in the Presbyterian Church that was established by his parents. Winton is an official in the Baptist Church which his family built. Riley is a Congregationalist—a deacon, or trustee, or something. Ed Jones is Methodist South, and I am Methodist North. By all the laws of our churches, Ed and I ought to be at swords’ points, but you can see we are not, which fact, I think, fairly indicates the religious spirit of Westover.”

The five Westover citizens silently agreed that the Judge had very tactfully presented their qualifications to the gentleman whose work was to find the right men.

“Judge,” said Mr. Saxton, “you have raised a great question! To many of our foremost thinkers, it is the one great question of the age.” He paused while his guests

exchanged looks of inquiry. They were well aware that the lawyer member of their circle had not spoken to raise a question, but rather to answer one.

Saxton continued: “Why is it, gentlemen, that Christian business men never get together, regardless of their denominational affiliations, to inquire into and discuss matters of the Christian religion? You meet to discuss your common interests in various business enterprises, in civic affairs, in social clubs, in community welfare, and in your public schools. You realize that Christianity touches every phase of life—society, business, politics, art, education, homes—and to say that it is the most important and vital factor in the futures of your children is no exaggeration of fact. You must realize that your interests in the Christian religion are mutual, and that the great problems of Christianity are not peculiar to any one of the several denominations which you represent, but are problems of all. I venture to say that, in your own minds, the value of your individual denominational interests, compared to the common cause of Christianity, is as a drop of water to a heavy rainfall. And yet, while you have each no doubt often met with your respective pastors and fellow officials to discuss your own peculiar denominational affairs, you have never met to consider ways and means for your vast and common interests in Christianity as a whole.”

There was silence for a little, but it was not for lack of interest in what their host had said:

Mayor Riley spoke slowly: “I suppose it is because we leave the ways and means of Christianity to the preachers.”

“You mean,” said Jones dryly, “that we leave the ways to our preachers—we dig up the means.”

They laughed.

Then the Judge spoke: "I suppose the reason is that the average lay member doesn't know enough about church matters to consider them intelligently. I'll bet Ed, here, can't give a Christian reason for the difference between his church and mine."

The groceryman grinned. "I'll bet Ed can't even tell what the difference is."

"You win, Joe," returned the real estate man. "I couldn't even tell why I am South. Why are you North, Judge?"

"I don't know," admitted the lawyer, "and, what's more, I don't care."

"I couldn't give a real reason for being a Baptist," said Winton. "Father and mother were, that's all."

"And that's all I know about Presbyterianism," admitted the groceryman.

And Mayor Riley confessed: "I'm a Congregationalist by accident—they all look alike to me."

Mr. Saxton said with quiet meaning: "And the amazing fact is that you gentlemen have fairly expressed the attitude of fully ninety per cent of the present-day church members, and, I should say, very close to one hundred per cent of all the Christians who are not identified with any denominational organization."

Judge Burnes asked thoughtfully: "Does any one here know how many denominations there are?"

Ed Jones answered promptly: "I don't."

Said Joe Paddock: "I know there are a lot of different kinds of Presbyterians."

"And a lot of Baptists," echoed Winton.

“I haven’t a ghost of an idea,” said the Mayor, “there must be fifty, at least. We have fifteen or twenty right here in Westover.”

With one accord they looked at the man at the head of the table.

“Do you know how many denominations there are, Mr. Saxton?” asked the lawyer.

Mr. Saxton answered gravely: “In the United States, in 1906 there were one hundred and eighty-three. There are more now. I can’t give the exact figures for this year.”

“You mean one hundred and eighty-three different *religions*, Mr. Saxton?” said the Mayor doubtfully.

“No, one hundred and eighty-three separate and distinct denominational organizations of *one* religion—Christianity. Judge, you and your friend Jones represent only two out of seventeen different kinds of Methodists. Mr. Paddock, you are one of ten kinds of Presbyterians. As a Baptist, Mr. Winton, you have your choice of seventeen varieties. There is a Church of the Universal Messianic Message, a Pillar of Fire, and a Reformed Zion Union Apostolic Church. There are the Defenseless Mennonites, the Christadelphians, the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, and the General Six Principle Baptists. There are twenty-one kinds of Lutherans. I really can’t remember all of the others.”

“I’ll say you have done pretty well,” muttered Joe Paddock grimly.

“Do you know,” said Judge Burnes, “I have often thought that when they say ‘God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform’ they must be referring to theology.”

“Our theologians have certainly devised ways enough to spend the money we give in the name of one Lord,” remarked the banker. “What do you suppose it costs the Church, as a whole, to maintain these one hundred and eighty-three competing roads to the same place?”

“Yes,” cried Jones, “can’t you see a railroad company building, equipping, maintaining and operating one hundred and eighty-three parallel lines, through the same territory, to one terminal station?”

“The waste of money must be enormous,” observed Winton. “Does any one know what these one hundred and eighty-three denominations cost the people—taking them all together as one church, I mean?”

“You can’t measure the value of the church in money, Henry,” protested Judge Burnes.

“Of course you can’t,” echoed Joe Paddock. “Christianity isn’t a matter of dollars.”

With one accord they looked expectantly toward their host.

Mr. Saxton, with a smile, asked: “Is education a question of money?”

“Not in the sense that you can buy it as you would purchase a hat or a pound of steak,” answered Jones.

To which Winton retorted: “Somebody has to pay for it.”

“You bet they do,” echoed Riley. “Our children go to school free, but what about our taxes?”

Mr. Saxton said gravely: “Jesus, Himself, made Christianity a matter of money, or its equivalent—goods, possessions, treasure, riches. Our church managers make Christianity a question of money when funds are needed for a new building, an organ, or the current expenses. Could our

ministers minister without their salaries? If money has nothing to do with religion, why do some preachers receive ten and fifteen thousand dollars annually for the services which they render the Lord, while others, in the same service, receive only five and six hundred?”

“Big preach, big pay—little preach, little pay,” murmured the groceryman.

“Is it not a fact,” continued Mr. Saxton, “that the professional evangelist’s salary is based upon his reputation as a soul winner—that the more souls he wins the more money he receives? Do our preachers, in their pulpit pleadings for money, ever hesitate to make contributions to the cause a gauge of religious sincerity? It is true that religion is not wholly a matter of dollars. Neither is Mr. Paddock’s grocery business. The grocery business is a matter of hunger, good health, frosts and rain and labor. Real estate, Mr. Jones, is a matter of home making—of housing people. Your profession, Judge, is a matter of justice and protection of human rights. We are not putting a money value on education when we try to see that our educational funds are not misused and wasted. The very fact that Christian character is beyond price should force us to count the cost of our churches and watch the expense of their maintenance and operation with the greatest care. Jesus, Himself, taught economy. Considered purely as a question of economics, universal irreligion would be ruinous. For every individual dishonest or criminal act, the people must pay many times the amount of money involved in the act itself. Our one great defense against the rapidly increasing immorality of our nation, and the consequent drain upon the strength of the people, is Christianity. Enormous sums are given to this holy cause, and the waste of this

money by the preachers and managers of the Church in perpetuating their denominational differences—which the Church, as a whole, agrees are of no importance—is the greatest economic crime of the age. The spiritual and moral consequences are disastrous beyond calculation. The Church, itself, is breaking down under it. Our national, moral collapse is a direct result.”

Mr. Saxton’s words were followed by a solemn hush. It was as if, for the first time in their lives, these men glimpsed the real magnitude and importance of the religious problem.

Then Winton spoke: “Mr. Saxton, can you tell us what the Church, as a whole, represents in money?”

Saxton answered: “As nearly as can be ascertained, taking the figures given in the 1916 Bulletin of the Bureau of the Census as a basis, the total valuation of church property in the United States—edifices, lots, organs, bells, parsonages, and general equipment including schools, homes and institutions of various kinds—is over three billion dollars. This amount, I am convinced, is too low. Church managers do not like to give figures—many churches refused—many protested against the inquiries, claiming that the United States Government had no constitutional authority to make an investigation of religious matters. One denomination refused outright to give any figures whatever. Many, who gave statements of their membership, preachers and other similar items, made no references in their reports to the money involved.”

“This sum of three billion dollars is the money invested?” asked the banker.

“Yes.”

“Can you tell us anything of the annual cost of operation?”

“The annual running expenses—and by that I mean salaries, fuel, lights, payments to maintain general denominational offices and secretaries, and so on, but not including denominational benevolences and missions—in round numbers is about three hundred million dollars. Our total yearly contribution to Christianity—new churches, running expense, missions and all—is around seven hundred million.”

“You appear to have made a study of religious conditions, Mr. Saxton,” said Judge Burnes thoughtfully.

Saxton replied: “I believe that the religious problem is so far more important than any other that the very life of the nation depends upon it.”

In support of his opinion, Dan Matthews’ representative then gave his guests the results of his employer’s investigation, as his chief had presented them to him that stormy night in Kansas City.

“And Christian business men, like you,” he concluded, “are giving practically no thought whatever to this alarming state of affairs. The situation which we have developed here this evening is typical. Your city is a representative American city. You are business men, church men, men of families. You believe that, to yourselves, as individuals, to your children, your homes, to citizenship, business, government, education, religion is of supreme importance. And yet you have never given an hour to the consideration of this question, as you would consider other problems which are of individual and community interest. You know about your schools. You can give figures relating to your banks. You can tell the value of the building permits issued each month. You know the costs and efficiency of your police department and your fire

department. You know the amount of money spent for cleaning your streets, for your sewer system, and for removing the city garbage. But this business of Christianity, which represents three billion dollars and a yearly cost of seven hundred million, which is life and character and happiness, and upon which the future of your country depends, you put into the hands of your preachers and church managers and never ask a question as to their management nor make an intelligent effort even to learn the facts.

“Let me prove that you gentlemen of Westover are not exceptions,” continued Mr. Saxton. “We may assume, I think, that the Chambers of Commerce and similar organizations fairly represent the business men of our nation. Some time ago there was sent to a large number of these organizations, throughout the country, a letter asking for a few of the simplest facts and figures relating to the churches in their respective cities. Thirty-nine per cent of these business organizations ignored the request. Of those who replied sixty per cent gave no information, explaining, in nearly every case, that it was impossible for them to get the figures. Only fifteen per cent gave full answers. Forty-five per cent referred the questions to ministerial organizations or similar bodies, and of these only one answered. Think of it. A business, representing in money an investment of over three billion dollars, with an annual expenditure of seven hundred million, and which, in addition to these great sums involved, is conceded to be of vital importance to every business, every city, every home, and every individual in the land, and the business men of the nation know nothing about it!”

“I should like to know what community service our churches render,” said Banker Winton thoughtfully.

“Outside of their denominational interest, you mean?” asked the Judge.

“Yes.”

Mr. Saxton said earnestly: “You must not overlook the fact, gentlemen, that every individual Christian character is an asset to his community. In every denomination there are many splendid men and women who are genuine Christians in spite of their denominational handicaps, and these Christ-like spirits are of untold value to the country. They are, everywhere, the saving element in our social, business, civic and national life.”

“Certainly, Mr. Saxton, I am not overlooking that. But the fact remains that the denominational churches do not make Christians without making Methodists, and Presbyterians, and Baptists, and Congregationalists, and all the other hundred and eighty varieties.”

Mr. Saxton, nodding assent, returned: “Four-fifths of every dollar expended by the Church goes to maintain these denominational interests.”

The banker persisted: “And what do the churches spend on community work—I mean work that is undenominational but Christian?”

“You are the treasurer of our Organized Charities, Henry,” remarked the groceryman.

“That’s why I raised the question,” retorted Winton. “Our Westover churches, as churches, have never given a penny to our civic charities, nor to any other community welfare work. Is that the case throughout the country, Mr. Saxton?”

Saxton answered: “I have found that to be the case, almost universally.”

“Our churches, under the present denominational plan then, do practically nothing that does not have their denominational interests in view?” asked the Judge.

“The further one goes in the study of this question, the more apparent that fact becomes,” replied Saxton. “And this is in the face of the truth that the Christian members of the Church, as a whole, almost universally consider their denominational interests of no importance when compared with Christianity, which is common to them all, and for which they give these enormous sums of money. You, gentlemen, are forced to give four dollars to support a system in which you do not believe, in order to give one dollar to the sacred cause of Christianity, in which you all believe. There is no place outside of a denominational church where a man can worship God. There is no organization through which one can spend a dollar for a purely Christian purpose.”

“If such a state of affairs existed in any other institution in the world, the people would demand an investigation,” declared Mayor Riley.

“You can’t investigate the Church,” said Jones.

“I’d like to know why not,” retorted Riley. “We investigate everything else in which the public has an interest. I’m in favor of a national committee, made up of Christian business men appointed by our Chambers of Commerce, to inquire into church finances and management. The people put up this three billion dollars and are putting up, every year, this seven hundred million. The Church wouldn’t, necessarily, need to be less Christian to be more businesslike.”

“It couldn’t be done, George,” said the Judge.

Said Ed Jones: “If a committee of business men *were* to take hold of the Church, the first thing they would do would

be to consolidate and cut out all this ruinous waste of money in unnecessary buildings and equipment, and in the duplication of operating expense caused by denominational competition.”

“I suppose something like five hundred million a year could be saved,” suggested Winton. “Think of the good work that the Church could do with, say, even two hundred million a year. I mean charities, hospitals, homes and all that kind of work, which Jesus certainly made an essential part of Christianity, and which the Church is now forced, for lack of funds, to leave to civic and fraternal bodies. Why, if our charities, instead of being done in the name of the city or Kiwanis or the Odd Fellows, could be carried on by the Church, in the name of Christianity, the religious effect would be tremendous!”

“Consolidation of all the denominations is an idle dream, Henry,” said the Judge. “For one thing, too many religious teachers and high salaried denominational officials would have to lose their jobs. The clergy has always controlled the Church—and always will. What would you do, for instance, with a billion dollars’ worth of church property that would be rendered useless?”

“Turn it into better and more beautiful churches—into hospitals and homes and endowments,” cried the groceryman.

“It could never be done,” insisted the Judge.

Mr. Saxton asked: “What is the Church, gentlemen? In *our* language, I mean—not the language of theology.”

“Legally”—Judge Burnes replied, “legally, well, it’s hard to say exactly *what* the Church is, legally. Actually, the Church is the whole body of Christian believers.”

“It is all the Christians, no matter to which of the one hundred and eighty-three denominations they belong,” offered Joe Paddock.

“A church is any group of Christians banded together to promote Christianity,” suggested Winton.

“And to worship God,” added Riley.

“The membership of any given church is *that* church,” said Jones. “And the combined membership of all the churches is *the Church*.”

Mr. Saxton smiled as he said: “It must follow, then, that the preachers and managers of our churches—or let me say of *the Church*—are the servants of the people who constitute the Church.”

“Certainly no one could hold that the members are the servants of the preachers,” agreed the Judge.

“Well,” continued Mr. Saxton, “the Church exists for a very definite purpose, does it not?”

“To build Christian character,” said the Judge.

“To teach the truths that Jesus taught,” said the groceryman. “And to care for the sick and needy, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, in His name, as He said we should do.”

“Why, then,” asked Mr. Saxton, “if the people are the Church, and the ministers and managers are the servants of the Church, and the Church exists for one definite purpose, why, if the people are not satisfied with the results obtained, may they not inquire into the reason for the failure?”

They all turned to the lawyer member of the circle.

Judge Burnes answered: “You overlook the fact, Mr. Saxton, that our church managers, who are directly

responsible for the existing conditions, are also our spiritual leaders and teachers. The clergy is the highest religious court to which the people can appeal. If our ministers could be brought to bar for their management of these vast sums of money entrusted to them, they would necessarily be tried before themselves and would render a verdict in their own favor. The members of the Church—and the membership *is* the Church—are in a difficult position. To question the policies of the managers is to question their spiritual teachers; and to question their spiritual teachers, is to question the religion of the Church itself. One of Joe’s customers can complain and it’s up to Joe to do something or lose the customer. That is because Joe’s customer *buys* something with the money he pays Joe. The clergy has taught the people to look upon their contributions to the church as gifts to God. When a church member pays money into the church treasury he, theoretically, doesn’t *buy anything—he gives the money to the Lord*. When the people put up this three billion dollars they didn’t invest it in church property—they gave it to the Lord. We don’t receive anything in return for the millions which we pay out every year. That would be heresy. Whatever we receive from the Church *is given to us by the Lord*. We don’t *employ* a pastor, we *call* him. We don’t *pay* him for his services, we *give* his salary to the Lord. He doesn’t serve us for *pay*, he gives his services to the Lord. I’d like to know how any committee of mere business men is going to investigate a situation covered up like that.”

“They couldn’t even find a place to start,” said Paddock.

And Riley added: “If a group of business men, like us, should begin to ask questions the preachers would simply

shift the inquiry to a theological discussion and *then* where would we be?"

"It seems to me, gentlemen, that you have at least fixed the responsibility," said Saxton.

"Upon the clergy?" asked Joe.

"No," said the Judge, "upon the membership."

"Exactly," said Saxton. "If the ministers are the servants of the Church, and represent the Church, and spend the Church's money, it is clearly the duty of the membership, which is the Church, to see that their preachers preach Christianity and spend the money they hold in trust for the Christian purpose for which it is given. If any one believed that the Christianity which Jesus gave to the world is dependent upon denominationalism the case might be different. But no one—certainly not the great majority—believes that, but quite the contrary, and, therefore, the money spent to maintain this denominationalism, which is defeating the cause of Christianity, is a misuse of the Church funds. The preachers ask the people to give money to the Lord and then use four-fifths of it for something which the Lord never contemplated."

"But, Mr. Saxton," said Judge Burnes, "my pastor argues that denominationalism is necessary to Christianity because people do not think alike and that we must, therefore, have a variety of churches in order to accommodate all."

"That's what my pastor argues," said Jones.

"And mine," echoed Riley.

Saxton replied gently: "And would your ministers contend that there are one hundred and eighty-three varieties of Christianity?"

The lawyer smiled. "I think not."

"Well, then, if Jesus gave to mankind only one Christianity, who gave us our one hundred and eighty-three denominations? Was Jesus such a failure, as a teacher, that we must rely upon our theologians to make His meaning clear? Do these theological confusions emphasize the simple truths of Christianity, or do they not so complicate and obscure Christianity that its directness and force are lost? Did Jesus know what He wanted when, in His prayer for His disciples, He said: 'Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, are in Me, and I in Thee.' Would your ministers contend that there were one hundred and eighty-three varieties of Oneness between Jesus and the Father to whom He prayed? To say that these theologically devised divisions of the followers of Jesus are necessary to the Christian religion is nothing less than to question the wisdom of Him who gave us Christianity itself. A child can understand Jesus. But all the theological seminaries in Christendom can't make clear the complicated systems of denominational doctrines, which they call Christianity."

There was silence for a little as Mr. Saxton's guests sat with bowed heads, thinking. And the countenance of the man at the head of the table, as he looked upon them, was aglow with the light of his mission.

At last Mayor Riley spoke: "We hear a lot of talk, these days, about the failure of the Church."

"That's about all you do hear—about the Church," said Paddock sadly.

“And not only by nonchurch people, but by the members themselves,” added Winton.

“Yes,” agreed Jones, “and most of our ministers, even, admit it.”

“What is your opinion, Mr. Saxton?” asked the lawyer. “Is the Church meeting the present-day religious need?”

For a long moment their host did not answer and they all saw the sadness which shadowed his eyes deepen. Then he said gently: “I am alone in the world. You, my friends, are men of families; you have homes and children.... What is your answer to that question?”

Again, at his words, a solemn hush fell upon the company. No man answered because each was thinking, now, things of which he could not speak. And yet, each knew that the others knew what it was that troubled him. And all were wondering if the man at the head of the table also knew why they were silent—if he understood. What had put those shadows of sadness in his eyes? Why was his voice so kind?

It was the groceryman who, at last, said slowly: “I confess that the Church doesn’t mean to me what it did to my parents. I don’t seem to get anything out of our services. I don’t believe our young people get much out of the Church, either. I believe that is why they don’t go more—because the Church means nothing to them.”

Winton followed with: “There is no question but that the Church has lost its influence—upon the younger generation, at least.”

“Our preachers are certainly not making themselves felt, religiously,” Riley agreed.

And the Judge added: “The Church is failing even to hold its own membership to the fundamental teaching of Jesus—we all realize that in our own lives.”

With one accord they turned their faces toward the man at the head of the table, and the groceryman spoke for all: “What is the result of your observation, Mr. Saxton?”

Mr. Saxton, in answering, spoke gently, sadly, but never had they felt so strongly the power of his character and personality. He spoke as one having authority. “You are agreed, friends, that the sole purpose, mission, or business of the Church is to teach the truths that Jesus taught, and to exemplify to the world the doctrines of the life which Jesus, Himself, lived among men. A Christian is one whose professions and life conform to the teaching and example of Jesus. By Christianity we, of the Church, mean, and the world means, the teachings of Jesus. Mr. Winton, you know the teachings of Jesus, and you know banking. Would you say that the banking operations of this country are Christian?”

Henry Winton shook his head.

“Mr. Paddock, would you hold that the mercantile interests, the business of clothing and feeding people, is governed by the teaching of Jesus?”

The groceryman did not need to answer.

“Mayor Riley, in your opinion, based upon your knowledge of the teachings of Jesus and your political experience, is the work of governing the people, of making and enforcing the laws of the country Christian?”

The Mayor did not reply.

“Mr. Jones, you have knowledge of lands and buildings—the housing and homing of people. Do the teachings of Jesus prevail in real estate and building deals?”

There was no answer.

“Judge, are our courts of justice, our penal institutions and the practice of law, governed by the principles of Christianity? Do our public schools and universities teach Christianity? Is the art or literature of our day Christian? Are our newspapers governed by the teachings of Jesus? Is our social life Christian? Is the policy of our theaters and motion-picture houses Christian?”

No one spoke.

Their host continued: “There are many *private* institutions and enterprises which *do* square with Jesus’ teachings, but I can find nothing in any phase of our national life, nothing in our many and varied public interests, nothing in any field of public activity, that can, with reason, be called Christian.”

Again Mr. Saxton paused, and the men who sat around the table felt, as they had never felt before, a sense of impending evil.

With solemn earnestness and with a sadness so poignant that his hearers were moved almost to tears, their host broke the silence: “Measured by the standard of Jesus’ teaching and example—the only standard by which we can measure Christianity—the Church itself—is not to-day Christian. The Master could not have contemplated anything like this multitude of warring denominations which are bringing His teaching to naught. Under the competition engendered by this denominational policy of the Church’s theological managers, which is contrary to that Oneness which Jesus taught, and for which He prayed, each separate organization is literally

forced to put its own peculiar denominational interests above the common cause of Christianity. If a denominational organization failed to magnify its sectarian peculiarities it would cease to exist. Denominations live, not on the Oneness of Christianity, but on the differences of theology.

Christianity is of Jesus. Denominational doctrines are of men. Therefore, the modern Church is not Christian.

“The preachers of every denomination, almost universally, preach things which they themselves do not believe but which they *must* teach to satisfy the theological requirements of their superior denominational officers—and thus hold their positions.

“You men know your churches. Consider some of the methods of raising money and try to square these with the spirit and teachings and example of Jesus. You have often served on church finance committees, Mr. Winton. Were all the contributions you solicited, from your fellow business men, voluntary offerings—asked for and given on purely religious grounds?”

“Most of the contributions to our new church building were little short of blackmail,” answered the banker. “And your church, Jones, held *me* up in the same fashion.”

“We all do it,” said Riley. “We put influential men, like Winton, on these money-raising committees because there are business, political, or social reasons why certain people can’t refuse them.”

“Churches are not, to-day, built in a religious spirit,” said Judge Burnes. “The business houses of the community are forced to contribute or lose patronage. The preacher, in appealing to his membership, appeals to their pride and to the spirit of rivalry. I never could imagine Jesus selling memorial

windows in his church to a few individuals who happen to have money to buy, while He gave no honor, whatever, to the thousands who, out of their little, contributed more, in proportion, than those whose names were thus heralded to the world.”

“What of the arguments used to induce certain desirable people to join the Church?” asked Saxton.

“Mostly business or social,” returned Riley.

Saxton continued: “Consider the methods of securing influence to gain a denominational advantage, and the methods and schemes by which ministers strive for personal honors, preferments, better positions, and higher salaries. What of the fact that the churches do nothing for non-sectarian charity and welfare work in their own communities, and even farm out their own needy members on civic organizations and fraternal orders. Consider that brotherly love in the churches is not even strong enough to unite two denominations when their own members can’t tell what keeps them apart. Witness Judge Burnes and Mr. Jones.

“How can an institution which is not Christian—in spirit, in name, in policy, in teaching, or in example—produce Christian character in the world? As long as the Church makes a mock of its own religion it cannot expect the world to believe in, or even respect, it.”

“No one can honestly deny the justice of your charge, Mr. Saxton,” said Judge Burnes. “Most of the church members and many of the ministers would admit these things are true. But just the same, it is a terrible thing to say—terrible!”

“The time has come, Judge,” answered Mr. Saxton, “when it is a terrible thing *not* to speak out on this subject. It is no longer a question of the Church saving the people—it has

become a question of the people saving the Church. It is a question of saving Christianity, itself. The future of the Christian religion is in the hands of the sincere Christians who are to be found in the membership of every denominational church, and who are Christians in spite of denominationalism. The future of Christianity and, therefore, of your country, your homes, your children, is in the hands of capable Christian business men like you.

“Our ministers are powerless. They are the product of denominationalism; they are trained in denominational schools; they are controlled by their denominational higher-ups. They are in the grip of this great un-Christian machine, and no matter how sincere and godly they may be, as individuals, they must obey the powers or get out. That is why, too often in these modern times, the preacher is neither the intellectual, spiritual, nor moral equal of the majority of those who pay his salary.

“The modern, down-to-date clergyman, under the ruthless competition of this denominational system, has little time or strength or thought left for the Christian religion. He is ten per cent social visitor, tea drinker and diner-out; five per cent handy man and speaker for all kinds of boosting clubs; five per cent political henchman; twenty per cent denominational advocate; five per cent protector and comforter of that portion of his membership who, because their deeds will not bear the light, must live under the cloak of the Church; and fifty per cent public entertainer. The remaining five per cent of him is teacher of the truths of Jesus, which, alone, constitute one hundred per cent of Christianity.”

As Mr. Saxton's guests made their several ways home, late that evening, their minds were not so much occupied with the material gains which they still hoped to realize through Mr. Saxton's friendship. They thought of other things.

It may be assumed, too, that their waiting and anxious wives were disappointed when no material progress was reported.

CHAPTER X

SUNDAY

THE work horses on the farm were in the pasture. They grazed leisurely. Now and then one would pause to stand with lifted head contentedly viewing the peaceful surroundings. Chickens moved sedately about the barnyard, selecting choice bits of food with lazy indifference, while the old Plymouth Rock rooster from the top of the fence surveyed the scene with quiet satisfaction. On the roof of the big barn pigeons made soft-voiced love. Swallows gossiped from nest to nest under the eaves. There were no men in the fields. The growing crops seemed to sleep in the sunshine. The orchard trees were dozing. The leafy giants that guarded the house rested. It was Sunday morning.

In town, the business streets, except for an occasional automobile, an empty street car, or a lone pedestrian, were deserted. Save at the post office, the cigar counters and newsstands there was no stir of life about the stores and office buildings. The homes on the avenue gave no sign that they were inhabited. The wretched dwellers in Shack Town had not yet issued from their squalid quarters. But in the restaurants, motion-picture theaters, night clubs and dance halls employees were actively engaged in removing the debris left by Saturday night crowds and preparing for the usual Sunday rush. The church janitors, too, were busy opening the houses of God—to air them out and rid them as much as it were possible of their musty, closed-up, weekday smell.

When the late breakfast at the Paddock home was over the groceryman went out on the front porch to find the Sunday paper. He picked up the *Herald* which was lying on the walk at the foot of the steps and with an impatient ejaculation collected three handbills, such as are commonly used by advertisers, of a sort, to litter well kept lawns and exasperate the citizens by the untidy appearance of their streets. Then, because he was not insensible to the beauty of the morning, he moved on to a rustic chair under one of the trees which shaded the generous yard. Seating himself, he leisurely lit his after-breakfast cigar preparatory to reading the Sunday morning news.

Following that Saxton dinner, the groceryman had held several interesting conversations with his fellow guests.

Henry Winton confessed that he had not slept well that night. He had never before heard religion discussed from Saxton's viewpoint. He was rather inclined to question some of Saxton's figures, and yet, he did not know, he certainly could not deny them. For a long time he had felt that there was something wrong with the Church. Saxton was a fine man, no doubt about that, sincere, genuine, and with unusual ability. The banker wished the Kansas City man would tell them something about his real business in Westover.

Judge Burnes felt that Saxton's presentation of the religious situation brought home the responsibility to the church members in a way that was difficult to escape. He hoped that things were not so bad as Saxton thought. After all, the denominations had accomplished much, but still, "The question is not what have they done; but, what are they doing now? Everybody knows that the Church is failing to

meet the present-day religious needs.” The Judge, too, wished that Saxton would make known his real business.

Ed Jones thought that Saxton was right but that nothing could be done about it. “There is waste in everything. Churches do a lot of good. We all know there is something wrong but what can we do?” Ed was disappointed that Saxton did not tell them about his contemplated enterprise in their city.

Mayor Riley found Saxton’s arguments unanswerable. And yet never before had he considered religion from the economic side of the question. Of course, in a way, it *was* a question of economics. Character—morality—honesty—they are all questions which affect the people as a whole. Saxton’s views of a national crisis were undoubtedly correct. There was a general feeling that something must be done and that the churches were doing nothing. He wondered what brought Saxton to Westover anyway.

The groceryman, himself, was bewildered. He felt that, so far as he was concerned, his old established mental attitude toward religion was upset forever. Christianity, the Church, religion could never again, in his mind, be held as something apart from the business, political and social life of the nation. But what to do about it! He doubted if the Church *could* change. Certainly it could not change without ceasing to exist as separate and distinct denominational institutions. It was unthinkable that the denominations would voluntarily close their doors—shut up shop—go out of business. He tried to talk it over with Laura but got nowhere. Of one thing he was sure, Dan Matthews’ representative was a remarkable man, and his presence in Westover was a big thing for them all. But was the big thing a material thing? Of that he was not so

sure. The groceryman was beginning to feel a significance—a meaning, a purpose—in Saxton’s dinner party. Where had he seen the man before?

The groceryman was about to take up his paper when he glanced at those handbills—three typical examples of the job printer’s art.

The first one announced: “The Greatest Sensational Motion Picture of the Year—‘Red Hot Mamas’—At the Royal—The Most Popular House in Westover.”

The second sheet implored him not to miss “The Biggest Feed and Dance of the Season—At Tony’s To-night—The Famous Wild Boys’ Jazz Band—The Prettiest Girls—Something Doing Every Minute—The Most Popular Place to Spend a Wide-awake Evening in Westover.”

Joe grunted his disgust and read the remaining handbill. “Don’t Go to the —— Church This Summer Expecting to Sleep—Pastor —— Will Preach a Great Wide-awake Series of Popular Sunday Night Sermons—This Church Is Famous for The Gospel.”

The groceryman crumpled the handbills and, for several minutes, smoked thoughtfully. Then he opened his paper to the church section where the first thing to catch his eye was a picture of a group of grinning jazz musicians with their instruments.

He read: “An Up-to-date Jazz Band Furnishes the Music at Services in the Fashionable —— Church—on invitation of the pastor. Other jazz musicians will appear in the church during the year.”

With awakened interest he proceeded to read the headlines of other church news items:

“Bible Class to Hear Eugenics Discussed.”

“Ghastly Means of Ending Life—given in play to-morrow. A rope, a gun, a razor, a dagger, gas, a drink of poison—all means to an end—of life. The Christian Endeavor Society will present the play Thursday night.”

“Broncho Jack, Here to Hog-tie Souls of Men—I will ride human herd here and I promise to rope, hog-tie, bull-dog, and scratch the Devil every evening.”

“Church Crowds Fall Off As Bitterness Lessened— Reverend —— blames the increasing respect and coöperation between the different religious sects for lack of attendance at church services.”

He read slowly every line of a long flamboyant blurb which closed with: “The public is cordially invited to hear this magnetic, humorous, young minister.”

He thought over an announcement of Sunday worship which promised: “The Meeting for Men and Boys will be a Thriller. There will not be a dull moment throughout the day.”

There were more headlines: “Battling —— vs. Beelzebub —The Reverend ——, ‘fighting parson,’ cornered the Prince of Darkness, grabbed him by both horns and twisted his neck until the entire valley reverberated with the strident sound of Satanic screams.”

“Pastor Seeking to Learn Life’s Greatest Kick—offers cash awards for best answer to question, ‘How is one to get a kick out of life?’ ”

“Varied Bill for Vaudeville—different features each evening will mark vaudeville performance at the —— Church fair—Oriental Stunt—Card Parties. There will be many parties of school children who will attend the Jitney Dance. Five or six cigarette girls will be in costume and sell the nicotine.”

“What Is Wrong with the Church?”

Turning to the programs of the Sunday services, the groceryman found in the columns of feverish announcements of special attractions: “extraordinary tenors,” “celebrated quartettes,” “popular singers,” “marvelous violinists,” “unusual tableaux,” “wonderful musical programs,” the following invitations and sermon themes:

“Come and Hear Sunshine Jim.”

“Our South American Neighbors—illustrated.”

“The Fifth Sermon in a Series on Famous Characters in Classic Fiction.”

“What I Saw at Third and Market Streets in San Francisco—He promises something of a most interesting nature.”

“An Ex-Governor to Occupy Pulpit.”

“Don’t Die On Third—with a number of interesting baseball illustrations. It is doubtful if any preacher to-day has as many friends among baseball players as Doctor ——.”

“Bleaching a Black Man.”

“The Go-Getter Church.”

“Presentation of Flag to Congregation by Elks—the Pastor being a member of the Lodge.”

“How’s Your Backbone? In this sermon he will tell how he knocked out Bob Fitzsimmons, the famous pugilist, in his pulpit. Tokens will be offered to the father whose boy looks

most like him; to the newest newlyweds; to the oldest man; and to the one who comes the greatest distance.”

“Standing On A Banana Peeling.”

“Music As An Aid to Better Living.”

“Why Johnny Fell Out of Bed.”

“You’ve Got to Quit Kicking My Dog Around!”

“Traffic to Be Discussed As Sunday Sermon—Doctor —— will raise and discuss many pertinent questions in this sermon. What is the cause of our alarming increase of automobile accidents? Unreasonable and unenforced traffic ordinances. Irresponsible and careless drivers. Inadequate brakes and unsteady hands. Should citizens be informers.”

“Why Go to Church?”

An automobile stopped in front of the house and the groceryman, looking up from his paper, waved a greeting to the young man who left the machine and came toward him across the lawn.

Georgia appeared on the porch. “Hello, Jack,” she called, “be with you in a minute.”

“No hurry,” returned the young man. Then, as the girl disappeared again into the house, he said to her father: “I was hoping I would see you this morning, Mr. Paddock.”

The groceryman was very fond of this fine young chap whom he had known since his birth.

“Business pretty good, Jack?”

“Growing all the time, sir. But I wanted to see you about our Organized Charities—the meeting of the directors and workers next Thursday, you know. It is mighty important that we have a full attendance. Everything is set to start the annual

drive for funds. Wilcox, the expert from Cleveland, who is to have charge of the campaign, will arrive Thursday morning. You won't miss this meeting, will you, Mr. Paddock? I'm counting on you and Mrs. Paddock."

"Sure, we'll be there, Jack. How is everything lining up this year?"

The young president of the Civic Charity organization answered doubtfully: "I'm afraid it's not going to be so easy to raise the money we need this year."

"Why, what's the trouble? Westover has always responded before."

"Up to last year our Charities' board always got what they asked for," returned Jack, "but you remember the last campaign finished about ten thousand dollars short. We've got to make the strongest drive we have ever made this year or we'll fall down worse than that. That's why I'm so anxious about this meeting, Thursday night. We've all got to be on our toes every minute—right from the start."

"But our people believe in the Organized Charities, Jack."

"Oh, the people are all right—they want to help—their hearts are in the right place. It isn't that."

For some reason young Ellory seemed reluctant to continue, but the groceryman was persistent.

"Times are good, Jack. Everybody is prosperous."

"Yes, sir, but—"

"But what?"

"You seem to forget, Mr. Paddock, that we have built four big new churches in Westover the last two years."

The groceryman, with the air of one who suddenly sees an old problem from a new angle, asked: "And do you think that

has any bearing on the difficulty of raising funds for our charities? I always thought most of the subscribers to our Civic Charities were church members.”

“That is just the trouble,” retorted Jack. “The great bulk of our Civic Charity funds *does* come from church members. And practically all of the money raised to build these four new churches came from the same church members. There is a limit to the amount that even the most generous person can give, you know. No matter what they would like to do, people can’t give beyond their means. It is because so much of the available money has gone into church building these last two years that we are short of the necessary funds for our Civic Charity.”

The groceryman did not answer and Jack continued: “The worst of it is that even if we get all the money we are asking for we will not be able to do half what there is to do. Conditions in Shack Town are terrible. Our only hope is in educating the public. We must somehow sell Westover the idea of working together, as a community, for the good of the community as a whole. The people have scarcely begun to realize what this Civic Charity work really means. You know how it is.”

The groceryman glanced down at his newspaper. “Yes,” he said thoughtfully, “I know how it is.”

Then as Georgia came toward them and he watched the faces of the two young people he thought how years ago Laura had come to him. The same glad eagerness, the same happiness, the bright eyes, the glowing color, the illuminated countenance, the impulsive gestures, the fond laughter, the gay voices. Suddenly he remembered his mother’s words: “It takes a lot of religion, son, for two people to love and marry

and live together long enough to raise children and be grandparents.”

As he watched them crossing the lawn toward the waiting roadster he wondered if there could be anywhere in the world a finer couple. Why did they not marry and establish their home? More than anything else in life, the groceryman wanted to see his daughter in a home of her own. With a farewell wave to him they drove away. The church bells rang. The groceryman felt old and incompetent.

Mrs. Paddock’s voice came from the front door: “Joe, if you’re going to church you must hurry and get ready.”

“I don’t think I’ll go this morning, Laura.”

“Not go! Nonsense, of course you are going. Miss Gordon is to sing, Mrs. Trevor has a cornet solo, we have the Goodwin Male Quartette, and Professor Levinski gives a special organ number. I wouldn’t miss it for the world. There is no finer program in any church in the city. Come on, you have just time to dress.”

The work horses, in the barnyard, dozed peacefully after their day of rest in the pasture and their evening meal of grain. The chickens had gone to roost. The doves and swallows were fast asleep. Grandpa and grandma, from their easy chairs on the veranda, watched the colors of the sunset fade, the western sky grow dim and the dusk of twilight deepen into the darkness of the night. Overhead, the kindly stars; here and there, across the fields, a friendly light.

“Well, Mother,” said the old gentleman, with a great yawn, “I don’t know about you, but I’m ready to call it another day.”

She answered with a little sigh of contentment: “I was just thinking it must be near bedtime.”

They were about to enter the house when grandpa, who was holding the screen door open for his companion, heard a strange sound. He put his free hand on grandma’s arm and she paused. The sound came again.

“What is it?” whispered the old lady.

“It’s there at the end of the veranda, whatever it is,” he whispered in return.

He quietly closed the door and they stood in the darkness listening.

Suddenly, as the sound came again, the old lady started forward. But grandpa held her back. “It’s some one crying,” she said in a low tone. “Some one is in trouble.”

Grandpa went down the steps and around to the end of the veranda, with grandma following close behind.

Crouching on the ground, almost hidden in the vines, they found a woman moaning, sobbing, almost delirious with fright or pain.

When grandpa spoke to her and touched her on the shoulder she cried out: “No—no—” and tried to drag herself deeper among the vines.

With a firm hand the old gentleman lifted the poor creature to her feet and together they tried, with gentle voices, to reassure and calm her as they helped her toward the door of the house.

Grandma turned on the light.

“Georgia!”

The girl’s dress was soiled and torn, her stockings grass-stained and ragged, her hair disheveled, her eyes wild, and

her face scratched and tear-washed. She was trembling, crying, laughing.

They helped her to a couch, and grandpa spoke firmly to steady her: “Georgia, you must control yourself. You are all right. Tell me, was it an automobile accident? Was any one else hurt? Where did it happen? You must tell me—there may be others needing help.”

With an effort, the girl answered: “It was an accident all right—not automobile though—there’s no one else—I—I ran away from him.”

The two old people looked at each other in horrified silence. The trembling girl, moaning and sobbing, hid her face in her arms. Then while grandma, kneeling beside the couch, soothed her with loving hands and low, gentle voice, grandpa went to the telephone.

“The Sheriff’s office.”

With a scream, the girl sprang from the couch and rushed across the room. “No—no—no—” she cried, snatching the receiver from grandpa’s hand and replacing it on the hook. “You must not—you shall not—it was—it was Jack.”

She clung desperately to her grandfather’s arm, laughing and crying hysterically. “Don’t you understand? It was Jack, I tell you—Jack Ellory! It was my fault! He’s just like all the rest! I might have known! Oh, God—oh, God—what a fool I’ve been!”

They half carried her back to the couch.

Hetty appeared. Grandma explained briefly that there had been an accident, but that no one was hurt, and sent her to make tea.

Grandma was urging the girl to take the hot drink when they were startled by a knock at the door.

Georgia clung to her grandmother like a frightened child. Staring at grandpa, with terror-stricken eyes, she begged: “Don’t let him in. Please don’t let him in, I hate him—I hate him—don’t let him come near me.”

The old gentleman, kneeling, took her in his arms. “There, there, child. No one is going to get you here. You know you are safe with grandpa and grandma, don’t you?”

The knock sounded again.

“Shall I go to the door?” whispered Hetty.

Grandpa shook his head. “No, I’ll go.” He patted the girl’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, honey, grandpa will take care of you all right. You just lie still here with grandma and Hetty.”

He strode across the room, threw open the door, and stepping out, closed it behind him.

The girl watched the door with wide, terror-haunted eyes. Grandma murmured soothing, reassuring words, as she would have quieted a frightened child. At a signal from her mistress, Hetty slipped away upstairs to see that the guest room was ready.

“I—I ought to see him,” the girl whispered. “I am to blame as much as he. I—I want to see him.” She was trembling again. “Don’t let him come—please don’t let him in.”

“There, there, dearie, it’ll be all right. It’s just a neighbor, likely, or one of the men, or some automobile people wanting to ask the road to some place.”

“No, no, Grandma, I know it’s Jack—I know.”

When grandpa appeared on the veranda, closing the door behind him, the figure of a man, vague and shadowy in the darkness, drew back toward the steps.

The old gentleman, with his back to the door, stood waiting.

The shadowy figure spoke in a voice uncertain with emotion. "I am Jack Ellory, Mr. Paddock."

Grandpa returned coolly: "Well, what do you want?"

"Is Georgia here?"

"Yes."

The younger man's voice was not lacking in sincerity as he ejaculated: "Thank God!" He removed his hat and wiped his forehead. "I thought she might be here. I came round the hill by the east road. I thought if she wasn't here I could phone for help."

Grandpa was grimly silent.

Jack moved uneasily. "May I—could I see her?"

"No."

Another painful silence. Then: "Of course you are right, sir. It was foolish to ask. I—is she—I hope...."

The old gentleman, standing so still with his back to the closed door, did not speak.

"I'll go, sir." The young man turned and started down the steps.

"Wait!" The word was a stern command.

Jack halted and in three long steps grandpa stood over him. "I want to know one thing, young man."

The one on the steps bowed his head. "I understand, sir. I have not harmed Georgia." He suddenly raised his head, and

with a pleading gesture, continued: “Great God, Mr. Paddock, I’ve known her ever since we were little children. She’s been the one girl to me always—since before we went to kindergarten together. She was never like the other girls to me. You know what I mean—you haven’t forgotten your young days. But this afternoon I thought—I mean I lost my head—I misunderstood—I thought—oh, hell! How can I explain?” He choked, his voice broke with something very like a sob.

Grandpa’s hand went out in the darkness to rest upon the younger man’s shoulder, and grandpa’s voice was gentle: “We’ll take care of her, Jack.”

A moment later Jack said: “Don’t let her go home to-night, Mr. Paddock. Telephone her father that she is going to visit with you for a few days. Don’t let them know about this. Home is no place for her just now.”

“That’s a good idea, Jack. I guess her grandmother is best for her right now.”

“And will you call me up in the morning, sir? I’ll not sleep till I know how she is. If she’ll let me, I’ll come for her and take her home when she is ready. But I don’t suppose she will ever speak to me again. I don’t blame her—she has always been different from the others—I never thought till this afternoon....” He turned suddenly and disappeared in the darkness.

Grandpa stood waiting—peering into the night. He heard the sound of the automobile. He waited while the sound grew fainter and fainter. When he could no longer hear the departing machine he still stood there peering into the darkness, listening, listening. Slowly he turned and reentered the house.

They watched silently as the old gentleman came across the room and stood looking down at the girl. He seemed to be trying to think out a difficult situation. At last, as if answering her unspoken question, he said quietly: "It was Jack."

"Oh, Grandpa, what—what did you do to him?"

"Nothing."

"Is he—is he gone?"

"Yes, he's gone. He is mighty sorry, Georgia—says for us not to let you go home for a day or two. Good idea, I'll phone your father and mother."

The girl laughed bitterly. "Why should I want to go home?"

The two old people looked at each other questioningly.

"Georgia," said grandpa firmly, "this is not quite clear to me. You must tell us—Jack says he did not harm you—that you are all right. Is that true?"

"Yes, that is true," the girl cried piteously. "I am not—harmed—not in the way you mean. Oh, Grandpa—Grandma—you *must* believe me!"

Again the old gentleman knelt beside the couch and took the overwrought girl in his arms. "There, there, honey—I think I begin to understand now. Of course you are not a bad girl. Grandma and I know all about it. You will just stay here with us for a few days. Henry is going to town in the morning and will bring what clothes you want. It will be all right. No one but grandpa and grandma will ever know about this. There, there...."

A little later, when grandpa had telephoned to Georgia's parents, grandma helped the girl to a warm bath, and after robing her in one of her own old-fashioned nightdresses, tucked her, with many a motherly pat and caress, into the white bed in the cheerful guest room.

But when the old lady would have turned out the light the girl begged: "Please, Grandma, don't leave me. I can't sleep. I'm afraid—I—shall go mad if you leave me here alone to think. I must talk—I must tell you...."

"Why, of course I'll not leave you, dearie, if you want me. I'll just go and tell grandpa that you are all right so he won't come blundering in on us when he is not wanted. I'll only be gone a minute."

When she returned she arranged the lights so that the room was almost in darkness, drew a chair close beside the bed, and, seating herself, took the girl's outstretched hand.

"Don't you think you could sleep, dear, if you were just to lie quiet a little and let me do the talking? Most people find it easy to sleep when grandma talks, you know."

The girl clutched the thin, old hand that had ministered to so many tired and troubled souls. "No—no—I must tell you."

"All right then," Grandma spoke cheerfully, in a matter-of-fact tone, that, while it lacked nothing in sympathy, was charged with comforting strength and assurance, "All right. If you want to tell me it is best that you should."

When Georgia did not speak for a little, the old gentlewoman added: "Start at the beginning, dearie. I don't mean the way back beginning—the real beginning I suspect is farther back than any of us realizes. Start, say, this morning, or last night maybe. You and Jack were out to a

party somewhere last night, were you, and danced till pretty late?”

“Yes—it was late when I got home. He came for me again this morning.”

“About church time, I guess that was,” said grandma.

“Yes—well—we went first to the club as usual. Our crowd usually gets together there. And they were all planning for the afternoon and night. But I didn’t want to go.”

“Didn’t you have a good time Saturday night?”

“Yes, I guess so—but somehow I was tired of it—so I suggested to Jack that we cut the bunch and go to the country for a quiet afternoon—just us two. He didn’t seem to care for the crowd either, so he got a box of lunch, and....”

“And a bottle of liquor,” said grandma, in her matter-of-fact tone.

“Yes—and we came out the state highway and turned off on the old east road that runs by the woods, you know.”

“That old road was your father and mother’s favorite drive of a Sunday afternoon,” remarked grandma.

The girl continued as if she had not heard: “We left the automobile and went into the woods. It was so beautiful—so quiet and restful and—and solemn-like—like a church ought to be. Jack said the woods always made him feel that God was not so far away as He seemed in the city. And we talked a long time about religion, and life, and such things.”

“Of course you did, dearie,” said grandma, “and Jack said he worshiped God in nature, I suppose.”

“Oh,” exclaimed the girl, “did he ever tell you about what he believes?”

“No, but you see I was young once myself, child, and we are all nature worshipers at certain times. You had your lunch in the woods, did you?”

“Yes—in the loveliest spot—beside a little pond. I wonder if you know the place?”

“I know it very well, child. And you had a drink or two of liquor—with your lunch?”

“Jack drank more than I ever saw him drink before. I only took a little—I never was so happy and contented—no noisy crowd—no one to bother—just Jack and me.”

“I know just how beautiful it was, dear, I know.”

“And then,” whispered the girl, “I—I don’t remember how it happened—I was teasing Jack just for fun—and all at once he caught me in his arms. He never did that before. I—I was frightened. I tried to make him stop but he wouldn’t. I fought him and broke away and ran. I didn’t know where I was going—I just tore away through the woods and brush—I was crazy. He called and called and tried to follow me. But I hid and wouldn’t answer, and yet, all the time, I could hardly keep myself from going back to him. And that frightened me more than ever. And so when he went another way I ran again. I felt I must get away from the sound of his voice. I ran and ran—until I couldn’t hear him any more. Then it began to get dark, and I didn’t know where I was. And then I saw the house, I didn’t know until I was right in the yard that it was your house.”

The girl was trembling again as if with a chill. “Oh, Grandma, Grandma, what is the matter with me? I don’t want to be bad—I’m not bad. But when Jack came on the porch I knew who it was—and I wanted to go to him. If you and

grandpa had not been with me I *would* have gone. I was afraid of him, too—but I was more afraid of myself.”

“There, there, dearie—you mustn’t let yourself get all worked up again. Of course you are not bad. Once we get some of your twisted thoughts straightened out, and some of your tangled emotions unsnarled, you will feel better.”

“He said he wanted me,” murmured the girl. “I thought he meant that he loved me, and I was glad. Then I knew that he only wanted me just as he wants other women. I always thought he was different with me. I know now he is just like all men and thinks of me just as they all think of all women.”

“Yes, child, Jack is just like all men as you are like all women. That is the first thing that you must understand clearly. It is as Jesus said: ‘He which made them at the beginning made them male and female.’ ”

“But, Grandma, Jack never treated me like that before.”

“And was it all *his* fault, Georgia?”

The girl turned her face away.

The old lady continued: “I’ve noticed for a good many years now that men in general try to live up to what their woman expects of them.”

Georgia’s reply was a troubled confession: “When he didn’t act like other men toward me I—I tried to see if I could make him.”

“What fools we women be,” murmured grandma. “What blessed fools.”

The girl returned with more spirit: “It seems to me that if he really loved me he would not have taken advantage of me.”

“And it seems to me,” the old lady retorted, “that it was you who took advantage of him. You wanted him to do what he did, and you tempted him. And you would have despised him if he had not responded to your advances. If a girl invites a man she has no right to expect him to ignore her invitation.”

Georgia was silent for a little after that and grandma wisely gave her time to think.

Then: “Is it wrong for me to want love, Grandma—I mean for me to want a home and children like you and grandpa have had?”

“That’s all there is in life that is worth wanting, dear child.”

“And did you want love when you were a girl?”

“Yes. And I had to fight to protect it too. Every woman, I think, for the sake of the children she hopes some day to mother, has to protect her love. But that doesn’t mean that you must distrust all men, dear. Most men are as decent and true and good as the women will let them be.”

“How can I help distrusting men?” cried the girl. “No woman, nowadays, believes in any man as you believe in grandpa. The men don’t even try to hide from us what they do—they brag about it. They don’t expect the girls to believe in or trust them.”

“And don’t you suppose that the men distrust the girls with as much reason?”

“They would be fools if they didn’t.”

“Of course. And you thought Jack was different from other men because he was different toward you. Well—don’t you see that he was different toward you because he thought you

were not like the other girls? Then all at once you acted just like the others. You let down the bars. You became common. You threw away the precious thing. *You* were to blame for what *he* thought, exactly as he is to blame for what you think.”

The girl moved uneasily. “I think—” she began, then asked abruptly: “Did you and grandpa ever have such an experience?”

Grandma smiled. “It wouldn’t be quite fair to grandpa for me to tell, would it, dearie?”

Georgia squeezed the old gentlewoman’s hand and smiled in answer.

“I suspect,” continued grandma, “that it has been the same since the time of Adam and Eve. I don’t believe any cave girl was ever hit with a club and dragged away by the hair of her head when she did not invite the attack. Served her right—the hussy!”

“But it seems to me, Grandma, that the whole world has gone sex mad. You wouldn’t believe the talk we hear—the things we say—the books we read and discuss. It’s just sex, sex, sex. And the girls are that way because the men want us to be.”

“My dear child, the love that brings a baby into the world is a good love. But like every good in life it must be kept from evil—it must be guarded and protected. And that, Georgia, is the woman’s part. Because it is the woman who bears the children, the Creator has given to her the control of this mating love. Water is good. Without it all life would cease. But a great flood is destructive. Sex attraction is of God. It is good and beautiful and right. But nations have been destroyed by this same force when it was loosed beyond

control. To keep this great creative force, sex, under control and make it a blessing rather than a curse, God has given us religion. Whenever in history the spiritual has been banished, licentiousness has ruled and ruin has followed.”

“It’s awfully hard for me to believe that grandpa and you were just like Jack and me,” said the girl.

“Well, we were,” returned the old lady stoutly, “we were just as human as you modern young folks dare to be.”

“But men and women, when you were young, were not so—so—oh, dear, I don’t know how to say it—I mean they were not so independent, so much alike, so promiscuous.”

“I’ll admit there was not so much of this new freedom that the women of to-day brag about,” returned grandma. “You see, to us, God, spirituality, religion, morality, were real. Strange as it may seem, immorality was actually immoral. You and Jack have cut loose from those old-fashioned religious anchors. You are trusting to luck. You invite disaster. If you don’t go to smash it will be an accident. Your grandfather and I had something beside sex attraction. You young people of to-day haven’t anything *but* sex.”

Georgia said thoughtfully: “I suppose the girls of to-day *could* be like the women of your day. We are physically strong; we are the stuff that pioneer mothers were made of—the War proved that.”

“Yes,” returned the old gentlewoman, “you modern girls have everything except the *one* thing to make your strength safe. I *know* it was my religion that made my love the safe and beautiful thing it has been all these years. The girls of my generation could have gone sex mad, too, but they had religion to keep them sane.”

“But, Grandma,” cried the girl, “how can we have a real religion? Where are we going to get it? Why, our own minister, even, is always making rotten *jokes* about love and marriage.”

“I know, child, but we women who have to mother the race have always had to hold fast to religion in spite of the preachers. God is the same always. And preachers or no preachers, if the women of this generation let go their hold on God and the spiritual realities of religion they will breed a race of moral degenerates. Until these advanced thinkers, who sneer at religion, can produce a laboratory baby they better not loosen the world’s grip on God. For human beings, sex love uncontrolled *is* degeneracy. And, so far, my dear child, the only control the world has ever known is spirituality.”

Some time passed before the girl spoke. She lay so still that once grandma leaned forward over the bed to see if she were sleeping. Then she said: “Grandma, do you think Jack will ever forgive me? Will he want me—I mean will he care for me as—as I want him to care—as he did before I let the bars down?”

“He will care more than ever, dear, because, you see, you put the bars up again. He knows it was an accident. But you must never lose control again.”

Again there was a long silence. Then: “I wish mother would talk with me the way you do, Grandma. Perhaps if she had....”

The old gentlewoman kissed her. “I’m going to leave you now, dearie. If I were you I would just make a little prayer—ask God to bless your love for Jack—to be with you and

make you strong for him and for the sake of the home and children you hope to have.”

But to grandpa, a few minutes later, grandma said with amazing vigor for such a gentle old lady: “If Laura Louise Paddock, and all these other down-to-date mothers, would give half the thought to their daughters that they give to their new-fangled culture our modern girls would have a chance.”

CHAPTER XI

GEORGIA RETURNS HOME

IT was not unusual for the groceryman's daughter to spend several days at the farm, so her parents thought nothing of it when grandpa phoned that she would stay with them.

Henry brought the things she would need, and the girl seemed her usual self. But grandma knew that she was thinking. Jack Ellory called the second day, but she refused to receive him, though she watched from her room window as he returned to his car and drove away.

They were just finishing breakfast Thursday when the telephone rang.

Grandpa, who answered the call, said: "It's for you, Georgia."

The girl hesitated. "Is it Jack?"

"No—it's your father."

When she turned from the instrument a few minutes later she was very serious. "Daddy sounds awfully lonesome. He says if I don't come home to-day he's going to come out here to live, too. I guess I better go. He is coming for me late this afternoon—can't come earlier because he has an engagement with Mr. Saxton."

"He doesn't need to come for you," said grandpa. "If you really think you ought to go home you can go in with me this afternoon. I'm going to town on business anyway." He stepped to the telephone. "I'll tell him—where did he call from, the house or the store?"

"The store."

When Georgia and her grandfather arrived at the girl's home the old gentleman refused to go in.

“Can't stop to-day, Georgia—haven't time—several things to see to, and you know I always have to get back to the farm before dark. It's dangerous enough for me to run this here machine in daylight. I don't know what would happen if I was to try drivin' it at night. Mother would be a-startin' out with a team to pick me up, I expect.”

“But you can't go without even saying 'howdy' to mother,” protested the girl. “Wait just a minute and I'll tell her you are here.”

She ran into the house to return a few seconds later. “Mother is not home,” she said. “She didn't know I was coming, I guess.”

When grandpa had driven slowly and carefully away the girl went to her room.

As she moved about, unpacking her bag and preparing to change her dress, she hummed a little tune. Two or three times she paused before the photograph of Jack Ellory which occupied the place of honor on her dresser, and looking at the face of the man she loved, she smiled—as a woman always smiles at the man she loves. Should she telephone Jack, or write him, or wait for him to make another attempt to see her? She decided that it would be better to wait.

With grandma's help, the girl had freed herself from the tangle of unwholesome doubt and suspicion. She saw her feeling for Jack clearly—understandingly. There was no fog of sex madness, now, to obscure her love. She had thought it all out. She knew now what she would do.

She would tell him frankly that she was to blame for what had happened, and ask his forgiveness. Then she would cut out all the wild parties. She would go with him for tennis and decent dinners and dances whenever he wanted her, but there would be no more of Tony's Place and Sundown Inn. Her set would guy her; but grandma was right, if she wanted Jack's love she must fight for it. If she wanted a home and children she must prove to him that she was worthy to be a mother. She had been trying to win Jack by being what they called a good sport. She would try always to be a good sport, but not the kind that her crowd meant. No man like Jack would want that kind of a sport for a wife. As she kissed the picture of the man she loved the mother light was in her eyes and in her heart there was that feeling of motherliness which every good woman feels toward her husband. She would protect him and their future. She knew how fine he was. She was sure of his response to her new life. He always responded so readily to her moods—that was what had led them so near the wreck of their real and enduring happiness.

The front screen door slammed. The girl went to the open door of her room and heard her mother's voice in the hall below. She was about to step to the head of the stairs to call a greeting when she heard another voice. She put out her hand and caught the door frame to steady herself.

Her mother's voice came again. "No, really, you must not come in. There is not a soul in the house but cook. Georgia is at the farm, as I told you."

The other voice—a man's voice, answered: "Please don't be so hard-hearted, Laura. I promise to be good."

"But, Edward, think of the neighbors—what if some one should come?"

“Damn the neighbors! Think of us! Have we no rights?”

“You naughty man! Well then—but you must promise to go in half an hour.”

“You darling!”

The door shut. “Edward!”

Georgia crept toward the head of the stairs and looked down to see her mother in the arms of Astell.

They moved on into the living room and the girl heard her mother’s protesting: “No, no, Edward. You must not. You promised to behave.”

Weak and trembling, the girl crept back to her room.

What should she do? What *could* she do? A few days ago she would have walked boldly down the stairs and confronted them. But with her own experience so fresh in her mind she could not. She recalled some of the things grandma had said. Some of her own thoughts came back to her. She felt her own guilt more keenly than ever. Queerly, she felt that she understood her mother as she had never understood her before. She felt a bond of sympathy with her—it was from her mother that she inherited evil desires. That her desires were evil there now could be no question. A voice within her cried exultingly: “You were right in your estimate of men and women. Grandma is all wrong. Grandma belongs to a past age. Your mother is a modern woman—so are you. Grandma’s philosophy and beliefs are not for the women of to-day.” She must do something—she *must*. She started toward the stairway determined to go down, but in the doorway of her room she hesitated. How could she face them? Sounds came from the living room. On a sudden impulse she slammed her room door. Then she stood trembling, listening.

Her mother called from the hall below.

She did not answer.

Her mother's voice came up from the foot of the stairs: "Is that you, Georgia?"

The girl opened the door noisily. "Did you call, Mother? I am dressing. I must have been in the bath when you came in. I'll be down in a few minutes."

"All right, dear—glad you're home."

The girl heard the front door open and shut.

Then her mother started up the stairs.

Fearfully, the daughter waited, half hiding herself in her closet as if searching for some article of clothing. Would her mother come to her room—would she dare?

Mrs. Paddock passed hurriedly on to her own room and shut the door.

The girl smiled grimly. "Oh, well," she said to herself, "I know exactly how she feels."

She looked at the photograph on her dresser and laughed. "Good old Jack."

Then in desperate haste she dressed.

When she was ready she knocked at her mother's door.

"You can't come in just now, Georgia," said Mrs. Paddock. "I'll be down presently."

The girl answered with a bitter smile. "Oh, all right, Mother. But I'm going out—have a date—so long—see you later—give my love to daddy."

She ran downstairs and out of the house.

Grandpa Paddock drove to his son's grocery store where he was told that the groceryman would not be in until evening. Leaving an order for groceries for which he would call later, the old gentleman went on to Jack Ellory's place of business. Jack chanced to be in the salesroom and, seeing him drive up, hurried out to the curb.

The young man, embarrassed and nervous, was stammering incoherent words of greeting when grandpa said anxiously: "There's something gone wrong with my car, Jack. Thought as long as I was in town I better find out about it or she might quit on me and make me walk most of the way home."

Jack felt the ground become steady under his feet. "How does she act, Mr. Paddock?"

"Acts all kinds of ways—like she had the heaves and stringhalt and spavin and mebby a touch of colic."

The automobile man laughed. "Run her into the shop, Mr. Paddock, and I'll have our veterinary look her over."

Leaving the car in the hands of the shop foreman grandpa and Jack retired to the private office, where the young man faced the old gentleman with a look of serious inquiry.

Grandpa smiled reassuringly.

"Well?" said Jack.

"I brought Georgia home this afternoon. She's all right."

Grandpa seated himself and the younger man dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief. "I certainly made an awful fool of myself, Mr. Paddock."

"I've made a dozen fools of myself, son," grandpa returned cheerfully, "it's easy."

“But it never happened with Georgia before, sir. You believe that, don’t you?”

Grandpa nodded. “It was due to happen all right.”

“Well, it has taught me a lesson. I’ll never lose my head again.”

“Didn’t it teach you anything else, son?”

“Yes, sir, it did. But I guess I have learned my lesson too late.”

Grandpa’s keen old eyes twinkled. “Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure of that, if I were you! There’s only one thing harder to figure than a woman, and that’s another woman.”

Jack smiled ruefully. Then with a grim earnestness he said: “Most of the girls, these days, are all right to play around with but no man with any sense would marry one of them—I mean, no man with my ideas would take such a chance.”

The old gentleman studied the young man’s face with frank interest. “Just what are your ideas, Jack?”

“Well,” said Jack slowly, “I was over there, you know, and tried to do my bit to make the world safe, and all that, by killing off as many of my fellow men as I could. But I’ve come to the conclusion that you can’t make the world safe for anybody by turning it into a hell to start with. I’m no saint, Mr. Paddock, but after what I went through in France I don’t believe that *any* country needs men to be killed for it as much as it needs men to live for it. And so I want to do my share of living for my country as I tried to do my share of dying for it.”

“And that means ...?” said grandpa.

“That means, as I understand it, Citizenship. It means taking my part in civic affairs right here in my home town,

helping to make Westover a better place for everybody to live in. I want success in my business because my business is part of the great game. I want money—honest money, I mean—because I want the power to make myself felt. I want a home—every decent man does, I think. I mean an established home, not a one-night stand arrangement in an apartment house or hotel. I want children, and a place for them to grow into the right kind of men and women, and I want to help make the community the kind of a community that will give the boys and girls a chance. I want grandchildren. Is that looking too far ahead, sir?”

“It’s not so far ahead as it seems, son.”

“Well, you can see that all means a wife—a mother, a real woman—not a sporting, feather-brained, fly-by-night, jazz-crazed, cocktail-drinking jane that a man can take like he’d take a drink of moonshine, and forget all about it the next morning, except for the headache.”

Grandpa nodded understandingly. “I suppose the average man wants something of almost any normally attractive woman, son, just because he is a man and she is a woman. But every man wants something of the woman he marries that he doesn’t want from any of the others. He wants her to mother his children. I’m talking about decent men, Jack. I know you are decent or I wouldn’t be talking to you like this. I’d be trying to run you out of the country.”

The young man bowed his head.

“I guess there’s no harm in my asking, Jack—doesn’t Georgia come pretty close to filling the specifications for the sort of woman a man with your ideas would want?”

Jack Ellory raised his head and looked straight into the old gentleman’s eyes. “She does, Mr. Paddock.”

“That’s *my* impression,” murmured Georgia’s grandfather.

“I have always felt that Georgia was different from other girls,” the young man continued. “I’ll admit I have been free with the others—but never with Georgia. Since I can remember, I have always liked her better and would rather be with her than any girl I ever knew, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to ask her to marry me. Damn it all! I’ve always been afraid. You see, sir, all girls are pretty wise these days. They know life and—well...”

“Do you mean, Jack, that you were afraid to trust Georgia?”

“I was afraid of the whole thing—of her—myself—and everybody. Georgia and I have both run with the same bunch, you know, and—well—while our crowd is not so bad as it might be, I’ll not say that we would inspire much confidence. I can see now that the reason I never tried Georgia out was because I was afraid she would turn out like all the rest. Then came last Sunday, and I found that she was not like the others. And now it’s too late—I have lost her.”

Grandpa considered the matter for several minutes; then he said earnestly: “Georgia is not a girl who will marry a man just for fun, like so many appear to do. She’d never take you with the idea that if she got tired of you she could easy enough divorce you and get some one else.”

“I know that is true, Mr. Paddock. That is, I know it *now*.”

“Hum! And now that you’ve settled your mind that you want her to help make your home, and mother your children, you’re scared to death thinking that she’s found *you* out and won’t have you—is that it?”

“Georgia knows what men are, Mr. Paddock. She has had opportunities enough to find out. And even though she has

never had reason to question my attitude toward her before, from now on, she'll lump me in with the rest."

Grandpa rose and crossed the room to look at a road map that hung on the wall. For some time he stood there, his back toward Jack, as if lost in the contemplation of state highways.

" 'Tain't fair for me to tell nothing out of school, maybe," he said as he turned at last, "but us young men must stick together, Jack. The girls are bound to make fools of us any way we can fix it and I guess that justifies us in heading 'em off whenever we get a chance. So I'll just say—mind you I'm not telling anything—I'll just say from what *my* girl told me about her talk with *your* girl, you have no reason to worry *too* much."

Jack Ellory sprang to his feet. "Do you mean, sir—do you think I still have a chance?"

Grandpa Paddock answered earnestly: "I wish you were as sure of heaven as you are of Georgia's love."

Then, when the young man was calm enough to listen, he added: "But you've got to give her her head a little, son. Don't go rushing things like you were trying to sell her an automobile before some other live wire could beat you to it. She's all woman, Georgia is, and that means, if my seventy-odd years' experience counts for anything, that she'll exercise her right to make you suffer some for what she admits she's to blame for. When your suffering gets to the point where it hurts her worse than it does you, she'll forgive you for what she's done."

At that moment a boy came to say that Mr. Paddock's car was ready.

"What was the trouble?" Jack asked the foreman.

The mechanic grinned. “Not a thing.”

“Now ain’t that just like me?” said grandpa.

Jack looked at him with an understanding smile. “Yes, I’d say that was just exactly like you. Drop in again when you find anything you think needs attention.”

They laughed together, and the shop foreman, without in the least understanding what it was all about, laughed with them.

Then the old gentleman, under Jack’s watchful eye, backed his car carefully out of the shop. In the street he pulled up to the curb and stopped the engine to say casually: “I see by the papers that you are having a meeting of the Organized Charities to-night.”

“Yes.”

“Going to make the annual drive for money?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, I never did much take to being driven,” smiled grandpa, “so here’s my check before you start.”

The president of the Organized Charities thanked him for the generous contribution, adding: “If they would all come through like this it would save us a lot of work.”

Grandpa looked at him thoughtfully. “You give considerable time to this sort of thing, don’t you, Jack?”

“Yes, sir, between the Charities, the Boy Scouts, and three or four other welfare organizations, it takes something out of every day. But it all has to be done.”

“You are not giving as much time to the Church as you used to a few years ago, are you?”

“No, Mr. Paddock, I am not. I give to the churches when they are raising money, because I have to. It would hurt my

business if I didn't. And I try to make the business pay for it the same as I pay for advertising. I sold your church a car for the pastor the other day."

"Don't you ever go, any more, Jack?"

"No, sir, I won't go to church and pretend it means anything to me when it doesn't. My charity work is my religion. Whenever the Church functions in our community life—I mean, when it actually *does* some of the things the preachers are always talking about, when it takes hold of our problems and helps to care for our sick and needy—I am with it. Some one must do this charity work. If the Church won't we unregenerated outsiders must."

"Fair enough, son. But maybe if a bunch of live ones like you was to get together, you could make the Church 'function,' as you call it."

"Not a chance!" retorted Jack. "Things are moving too fast these days for anybody to accomplish anything with antediluvian, worn-out equipment. All the old carriage factories in the world, combined, couldn't make an automobile."

"That's right," agreed grandpa. "And automobiles and carriages were made for exactly the same purpose, too—to get people somewhere."

Jack laughed. "The automobile gets more people there and gets them there quicker, though. That's why the carriage works were scrapped or converted into automobile factories."

When grandpa was gone, Jack shut himself up in his private office. "What a wonderful old couple Grandpa and

Grandma Paddock are,” he thought. “When Georgia and I are grandparents....” He wondered if he dared to call her up.

He was reaching for the telephone when the instrument rang. It was Georgia calling him. She was at the club. He must come right away—she needed him.

“What’s the matter?” he asked anxiously, for her voice sounded a little queer.

“I’ll tell you when you get here,” came the answer.

Jack caught up his hat and almost ran out of the building.

The girl was waiting for him, flushed and excited, on the veranda of the club house. How beautiful she was!

“Hello, old-timer,” she cried as he ran up the steps. “I’ll tell the world you didn’t lose any time answering the call of the wild.”

“Are you wild?” he asked, smiling—a little puzzled by her manner.

“I’ll say I am—wild and rarin’ to go.”

He spoke seriously. “What’s the trouble, Georgia?”

“No trouble at all.” There was defiance in her voice. “I’m throwing a party, that’s all. Harry Winton, the Burnes boys, Grace, Molly, and all the rest of the regular bunch. You are due to chaperon me. And believe me, boy, you’re going to have your hands full. I got hold of Davie Bates and he’s bringing us the hooch. I was afraid you might not have enough in your locker. Davie will be here any minute now. Nothing like having a groceryman papa with an understanding delivery boy, is there? What’s the matter, old top?—you look funny.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to count me out, Georgia.”

“Count you out, nothing—where would I be without my little playmate?”

“But I have a meeting of the Organized Charities to-night. I can’t cut that, you know.”

“Aw, what’s a charity meeting between friends—they’ll get along without you. Don’t kid yourself that you’re so necessary, old dear—go get yourself a drink and you’ll feel different. The bunch will be along any minute now.”

“Georgia—I....”

“Yes, sir.”

“I must tell you something, Georgia.”

“You can’t tell *me* anything, my boy; but if it will relieve your mind—shoot.”

“Come, let’s find a place where we can talk.”

He led her to a secluded corner. “Have you forgiven me for what happened Sunday, Georgia?”

“Nothing happened, did it?”

“I love you, Georgia.”

“My Gawd! And you haven’t had the first drink yet!”

“Georgia, you must listen to me. I am serious. I love you.”

“Of course you do, old dear. And I love you.”

“Will you be my wife?”

“Your wife! Just like that! Don’t make me laugh, boy. I’ll get drunk with you, but I wouldn’t marry anything that even looked like a man. Marriage is all out of date, old thing—didn’t you know about that? It belonged to my grandmother’s day. Marriage! Huh! I’ll respect the dead and all that, but I won’t stand having a funeral service read over me while I’m living. I’m yours if you want me, Jack dear—and I’m hoping

you do, but don't ask me to be old-fashioned. I'm a free woman, I am, and so help me God, I'm going to *stay* that way. Now will you go and get us a shot of hooch? There's my sainted dad's delivery boy in his little old Ford, with the goods, right now."

CHAPTER XII

TRAGEDY

THE meetings of the Organized Charities of Westover were held in one of the rooms in the City Hall. There were about thirty people—directors and workers, in the organization—present that evening. Because they were about to launch the annual drive for funds, and because the professional campaign director from Cleveland was on hand to take charge of their money-raising operations, the meeting was of more than usual importance. President Jack Ellory had personally urged each individual to be there. But when they were all assembled and the time set for the meeting had arrived, the president, himself, was not present.

Some of the company were church members, but with the exception of the treasurer, Banker Winton, the most active workers were not identified with any religious body. The Organized Charities did not represent the Church in any way. The organization represented Westover. The meetings were held without any kind of a religious note or suggestion and yet, the nature of the work was distinctively Christian in that it was taught by Jesus and, by Him, made an essential part of Christianity. The members of the board and the workers were not there as Christians, they were there as citizens. They were interested because they were intelligent enough to recognize the necessity of caring for the city's poor. It was not a sense of Christian but of civic duty which prompted them. They would have been surprised had any one thought of them as representing the Church. Many of them would have been indignant. Even those who were church members were not

there in the name of their churches. They were there in the name of the city of Westover. And no one thought it strange that the Church, which exists for the sole purpose of teaching by preaching and by example the truths of Jesus, should have no part in this Christian work of ministering unto the city's sick and needy.

It was nearly an hour past the time for opening the meeting when the vice-president, urged by several members of the board, called the meeting to order.

The people were looking at their watches, whispering, wondering, and restlessly watching the door. There was a feeling of nervous tension in the room.

"I can't imagine," said the chairman, "what has delayed our president, Mr. Ellory. We all know how enthusiastic and faithful he is. Something very unusual must have occurred."

Mrs. Winton whispered to Mrs. Paddock: "What in the world do you suppose has happened?"

"I can't imagine," Laura returned.

"Where is Georgia, Laura?"

"I don't know. She left home about four o'clock—said she had a date."

The presiding officer rapped for silence.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read, the treasurer made his report, and some unfinished business was disposed of. Then Mr. Wilcox, the professional money raiser from Cleveland, was introduced.

"Mr. Wilcox," the chairman explained, "is to have entire charge of this campaign to secure funds for our city charities."

There was a round of applause and the company settled down to the important business of the evening.

But the expert charity worker had barely concluded his opening remarks, when he was interrupted by the hurried entrance of a motor-cycle policeman.

When the speaker paused and gazed toward the door every one in the room turned. A hush fell over the company as the man in uniform stood looking them over, evidently searching for some individual. Then the officer stepped forward and, with a motion of his hand, drew Banker Winton aside.

Mrs. Winton gasped, and Mrs. Paddock slipped a supporting arm around her.

With breathless interest the company watched while the policeman whispered to Mr. Winton. The banker caught the officer's arm as if to keep himself from falling.

Mrs. Winton screamed: "Harry—my boy, Harry!" and rushed to the two men who stood with bowed heads.

Mr. Winton, with an effort, mastered his emotion and supported his wife. The groceryman and his wife hurried to their friends. Others gathered round. The room was filled with whispers. White faces—frightened eyes—trembling lips.

Quickly, the awful word was passed: "Automobile accident—car went off the bluff curve a mile this side of Sundown Inn—young Winton killed. He was driving—no one else badly hurt—drunk! That's not a dangerous road. Speeding—drunk—wild party. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Winton. Everybody has been expecting it. Only child."

Tenderly they assisted the stricken parents to their automobile. Mrs. Paddock would go with them to their home.

Joe would follow in the Paddock car.

And through it all, the groceryman's brain was hammering: "Georgia—Georgia—Georgia."

When the Wintons' car pulled away, the groceryman drew the officer aside.

"Young Winton was drunk as usual," said the representative of the law. "There was a party—three cars. They had been at Tony's and were on their way to the Inn. Winton's car was last. They were speeding recklessly, and my partner and I were following them when it happened. We were on the lookout because we saw the bunch when they arrived at Tony's earlier in the evening. I didn't get the names of the others in the Winton car. My partner looked after that while I came to tell Mr. Winton."

"My—my—daughter?"

"She was with the party, Mr. Paddock, but not in the Winton car. She was ahead with Jack Ellory in his roadster."

The hour was late when the groceryman and his wife, after doing all they could for their stricken friends, left the Winton home.

As they drove down the silent street, Mrs. Paddock whispered: "Oh, Joe, I'm so frightened—Georgia...."

Joe repeated what the officer had told him—their daughter was not hurt.

"But, Joe, she was in the party—the talk, it is terrible—the whole town will know. The newspapers! Poor Mary Winton! Can't you do something to keep Georgia's name out of it—can't it be hushed up? You must do something!"

As they turned into the driveway at their own home they looked for a light in the window of their daughter's room. There was no light.

The groceryman looked at his watch. "It's twenty minutes of two."

"She may be in bed," whispered Mrs. Paddock.

"If she were home she would be waiting for us," returned Joe.

They entered the silent house and Mrs. Paddock went up to the girl's room. She was not at home!

The mother returned to her husband in the living room and they looked at each other in frightened silence.

The groceryman paced up and down. Mrs. Paddock moved about wringing her hands.

"Can't we do something?" cried the distracted mother. "Call Sundown Inn—they will know her—ask for Jack Ellory."

The groceryman was about to act on her suggestion when they heard the front door open and close.

They waited—breathless.

Their daughter came and stood before them.

The girl's face was flushed, her eyes were bright and hard, she moved unsteadily, with an air of reckless abandonment. She was not at all the girl who had stood before them that morning of her dream. The groceryman moved closer to his wife. Father and mother and daughter!

With a mocking grin, and a playfulness which filled their hearts with ghastly fear, the girl said: "Oh, you spooners! Caught you in the very act, didn't I? Aren't you 'shamed? At

your age—this time of night—I'm surprised—that's what I am—surprised!”

Too shocked to speak they could only gaze at her in horrified silence.

With exaggerated seriousness the girl continued: “Well, what you got to say for yourselves? What you looking at me like that for—I'm not a ghost. I'm flesh and blood girl, I am. Good flesh and blood, too—no spirit about me. Don't you know your darling daughter? What's wrong with you two, anyway?”

“Georgia—” gasped Mrs. Paddock. “What *is* the matter—what has happened to you?”

The groceryman, watching his daughter closely, did not speak.

“Matter?” returned Georgia. “Is anything the matter? Everything's lovely, far's I can see. Nothin' matter with me. You two 're havin' good time aren't you?” She laughed and walked unsteadily to a chair.

The mother uttered a low cry: “Oh, Joe, Joe, she's *drunk!*”

The girl chuckled. “You should worry, Mother dear, you should worry!”

Then Mrs. Paddock arose to the occasion. In righteous indignation she stood over her daughter. “You dreadful girl! Have you no sense of decency—no shame? The idea of you, *my daughter*, brought up as you have been, in a Christian home, being in this disgusting condition.”

The groceryman murmured warningly: “Go slow, Laura.”

Georgia threw up her head and her eyes blazed quick defiance. “That'll be about enough from you, Mother dear—I've had all your lectures I'm going to stand for. I'm a free

woman, I am. If daddy has anything to say, that's different. But before you preach to me about Christian homes and all that bunk, you'd better clean your own slate. That's what I mean. You know what I mean, too! A swell Christian you are! A swell mother, too, if you ask me!"

Mrs. Paddock, white with rage, shame and fear, dropped into the nearest chair.

The groceryman spoke: "Georgia—"

"All right, Daddy."

She seemed steadied a little, and he asked: "Have you heard what happened to-night?"

"I know what happened to me when I came home from the farm this afternoon." She faced her mother again.

Mrs. Paddock cried out: "Please, please, Georgia!"

The groceryman looked from his daughter to his wife, and back to his daughter, wonderingly.

"I mean about Harry Winton, Georgia. Do you know about him?"

The girl answered recklessly: "He was good and drunk, if that's what you mean. He and the Burnes boys were certainly lit up when we all left Tony's for Sundown Inn. That's the last I saw of Harry or any of the crowd. You see, Jack and I cut the bunch before we got to the Inn, and beat it into the country all by our lonesomes."

Mrs. Paddock exclaimed: "You went into the country, alone with Jack Ellory—at this time of the night—in your condition?"

"Well, what of it?" flamed Georgia. "If you are raising a moral question—well—I wouldn't if I were you. I don't mind telling you, though, that Jack asked me to marry him."

“And you—you accepted him?” gasped the mother.

“Accepted him—me? Well hardly—not in the way you mean,” sneered the girl. “Don’t make me laugh, Mother dear. I told the dear boy I’d get drunk with him.”

Mrs. Paddock hid her face in her hands. The groceryman sat with bowed head.

Watching the effect of her words with a ghastly smile, the girl continued: “Think I’d marry any man after what I know about the sacred ties of matrimony? Not much! Marriage—love—and all that—seems to have worked all right in grandma’s time. Perhaps it was, like grandma says, because they had religion to help. Maybe if we had a little religion we could make the grade, too. I don’t know how anybody would go about getting religion these days, though. We’re advanced—we are. We got improvements, and culture, and intellectuality, and art, haven’t we, Mother dear? *You* know. Marriage for keeps is the bunk—it’s—it’s obsolete. That’s good word ‘obsolete’! Love ’em hard and leave ’em quick—that’s down-to-date idea. Take your lovin’ where you find it, but don’t take it too seriously. That’s my motto! We women have won our freedom—just as free as the men—aren’t we, Mother dear? You know what I mean. Do you know what I mean, Daddy? Sometimes I think you do, and then again I think you don’t. You’re such an old-fashioned groceryman! Mother and I—we are modern—we know—bet your life we....”

The groceryman interrupted her: “Georgia, Harry Winton is dead.”

She gazed at her father stupidly. “What’s that you say? Harry dead?”

“He was killed in an automobile accident on the road to Sundown Inn.”

As the girl grasped the fact, her eyes grew big with horror. “Dead!” she whispered hoarsely. “Jack tried to persuade him he wasn’t fit to drive. Always was a reckless fool. He had it coming. Good boy at heart—just couldn’t carry his liquor—dead!”

Suddenly she slumped down in her chair, crying, moaning, her body shaken with fear and grief.

They half carried the girl upstairs to her room.

Under the stress of the moment she was like a child and clung piteously to her father, who tried to soothe her.

“Oh, Daddy, Daddy—I’m so sorry—poor Harry—there wasn’t a mean thing about him—as kindhearted a boy as ever lived. Oh, God, what a mess!”

Mrs. Paddock, kneeling, removed the girl’s shoes. Then motioning Joe to leave them, she said: “Come, dear, let mother help you to undress.”

At the head of the stairs the groceryman hesitated. It was no use to go to his own room—he felt he would never sleep again. He wanted to be near his daughter. He felt that she relied on him. But he was so helpless. He wanted to go back to her, but it was her mother’s place. After she was in bed he would go to her.

He heard the girl crying. Then his wife’s voice: “Come, Georgia, let me help you—you must get to bed.”

“Oh, Mother, I can’t believe it! Poor Harry—it isn’t true—tell me it isn’t true?”

Mrs. Paddock, at her daughter’s collapse, seemed to have recovered her usual air of superiority. The groceryman heard

her say sternly: "I certainly hope this will be a lesson to you and your crowd of hoodlums, Georgia. You must tell me—I must know—as your mother I have a right to know. You and Jack Ellory to-night—you say you went into the country with him—where did you go—what...."

At the name of Jack Ellory the girl sprang to her feet and pushed her mother away. In a voice charged with scorn and fury she cried: "It's none of your business where Jack and I went or what happened. Don't you ever dare to mention his name to me again. He's too good—too fine—too big—for you to understand if I were to try to tell you."

The groceryman grasped the stair rail for support. He felt suddenly weak and sick.

His wife was pleading: "Please don't, Georgia—I—I—am your mother, dear."

"You've said it," retorted the girl, with bitter cruelty. "You are my mother! Next you'll be reminding me that you are daddy's wife. Why don't you rub it in good while you're at it?"

Mrs. Paddock attempted to carry it off with a show of dignity, but her voice faltered: "I—I—hope you know what you are trying to say—I'm sure I don't."

"Oh, you don't! Well, in plain words, then, I saw you in the arms of your beloved Edward Astell this afternoon when you and he thought you were alone in the house."

Mrs. Paddock, with broken, frightened words, pleaded for mercy. Crushed with shame, terror-stricken, she begged the girl to stop.

But the daughter went on pitilessly while the groceryman heard every word.

“So you *do* understand what I’m talking about, after all, do you? Everybody in Westover, except poor daddy, knows how you have been chasing that low-down beast. You’ve told me many times that you had no desire to be a good sport. Well, I’ll say you’re not—you’re a rotten cheap sport. You couldn’t even pick out a regular man. If you had to have some one, besides daddy, why in God’s name couldn’t you fix on something better than that bloated, blear-eyed, flabby toad? You know, as everybody knows, the kind of women *he* gets drunk with! Of course you’d say we must forgive his rottenness because he’s such a genius—the intellectual and artistic leader of Westover—the darling of your culture clubs. You are one of his women, I suppose, because you can’t resist the charm of his marvelous mentality—because he is so understanding—so kind and thoughtful and attentive in all the little refinements that superior, sensitive souls like you need. And you have the nerve to pretend that you are horrified because I go for a ride with Jack Ellory! Well, you don’t need to worry about me! Being only a girl, I haven’t the protection that a respectable married woman like you enjoys, I know, but I can take care of myself just the same. You feel terribly sorry for Mr. and Mrs. Winton, don’t you? And you’d like to make me feel that I am to blame for Harry’s death because it was my party. Well, I am to blame. It was my liquor that made him drunk. But I’ll tell you this—if I had actually killed him I wouldn’t change places with you. You’ve killed something in daddy, and you’ve killed something in me, that’s more than the death that came to Harry Winton!”

The groceryman never knew how he got down stairs and into the living room. He saw the familiar objects—the furniture—the books—the pictures—as in a dream. All the

associations—the home memories of his years—crowded in upon him. The piano—his wife’s music—that painting—her art. He was not conscious of having heard his wife leave Georgia’s room, but he knew that she was in her own chamber. He could see her as clearly as if he were with her—she was frightened—she was hoping that he had not heard; she wanted to call him, but she dared not; she was wondering if he *had* heard, what he would do.

What should he do? Should he go to his wife and tell her that he had heard? Should he go to his daughter and try to comfort her? If he confronted his wife with what he knew, what would follow? Very clearly, the groceryman saw the ruin of his home—the home which they had built together through the years. He saw the separation—the scandal—the newspapers—their friends—the effect on Georgia’s future. His daughter’s future! The groceryman caught at that thought and held fast to it. For Georgia’s sake, he must go carefully. He must think the thing out. He must consider every point—every move. If it were not for Georgia he could decide instantly. He loved his wife, but if she was not happy in his love, why—then.... But he must do what was best for Georgia.

He was to blame, he supposed. He had really been too engrossed in his work of providing for his wife and daughter. He had been too ambitious for them. Perhaps if he had tried to keep pace with Laura’s interests—if he had shared her ambitions—given more time to music, art, literature, the social life. She had found something in that fellow Astell which he, the commonplace groceryman, could not give. If it were not for Georgia....

Suddenly it came to him that there was one thing he *must* do. No matter what he did after that, there was one thing which he must do first. He must kill Astell. Custom, tradition, his honor, demanded that. It would not be hard. He did not even think of it as murder. It was just one of those things that must be done. He did not particularly want to kill Astell, but he owed it to his own manhood. If he was ever to look men in the face again he must destroy this creature who had brought shame upon him. It was a duty he owed, not only to himself but to his friends—to other fathers and daughters—to other homes. The groceryman had always tried to do the things which he felt were his duty, like helping the Booster Club, acting on the Organized Charities Boards, going to church. He would kill Astell, then he would decide what was best to do next.

His revolver was in his dresser upstairs in his room. It was in the right-hand corner of the middle drawer. Deliberately he walked to the stairway. It was a relief to have something definite to do. But with his foot on the lower step he stopped. Georgia! To kill Astell would be to drag the whole shameful story into the light. His daughter would be branded as the daughter of a bad woman, and a murderer. But to kill a creature like Astell would not be murder! Georgia—his daughter—his pal—his little girl! He must go slow. He must think this thing out further. He must make no mistakes.

Back in the living room he sank into a chair. His head dropped forward—his eyes were fixed on a figure in the carpet. He tried to think. God, how tired he was! He must think. His thoughts went round and round in a circle, coming back always to what was best for Georgia.

Wearily, at last, he raised his eyes to that picture of Jesus which hung above the radio. He did not consciously look at the picture. But when his glance chanced to fall upon it he remembered that it was a wedding present from his parents. All his married life that picture had hung there in the living room. He remembered how the night Georgia was born he had sat before it as he was sitting now—waiting—waiting—and when their boy was born—and when he died. Because it seemed to afford him relief from the maddening tangle of his thoughts, he studied the pictured face. He wondered, if Jesus could speak, what would He advise? What nonsense—Jesus had never had a daughter like Georgia—Jesus had never had a wife to—to.... But Jesus was the wisest man the world had ever known. His wisdom was not of men. His teaching was of God.

And then a strange thing happened. As he gazed at that pictured countenance of the Master the groceryman suddenly realized that the face was the face of some one he knew. That feeling of calm, inner strength, the air of gentle authority, the expression of sympathy and understanding, those sorrow-shadowed eyes, they were real, living, familiar, in the flesh. It ceased to be the pictured face of a teacher who lived in the ages of the past. It was the face of a friend—an associate who was living now—a friend who was in touch with modern life as Jesus had been a part of the life in Galilee—one who knew all about *him*, the groceryman, and his troubles. Those eyes! Why—why—of course—how stupid not to have seen it long ago—John Saxton!

The groceryman understood now that it was his familiarity with this picture of Jesus that had made him feel that he had known Dan Matthews' confidential agent somewhere. It was

strange that he had not thought of Saxton before. Saxton would know what he must do. So many times the groceryman had felt that Saxton understood and was waiting to help him. Saxton would help him now.

Very quietly the groceryman left the house.

CHAPTER XIII

GETTING TOGETHER

IT cannot be said that the groceryman had definitely determined to go to John Saxton at that hour of the night. He had acted on the thought because he had reached a point where he must do *something* or go mad. The physical movement, to a degree, calmed his overexcited mind. The quiet night, the empty street which echoed his footsteps, the silent houses with here and there a lonesome light, soothed him. He wondered about the people sleeping in those dark houses. How many of them were hiding troubles and shame?

By the time he had reached State Street in the business district, the groceryman had decided that to call for Saxton at that unusual hour would not be wise. The night clerk at the hotel would be sure to comment. It might cause talk and, above all, Georgia's father must avoid talk—he must shun even the appearance of anything unusual. But what should he do? He could not bear the thought of returning home. He was not wanted. To be away from that house, in which he now felt himself a stranger, was a necessity.

In this mood he came to his grocery store with a feeling of relief. He belonged here. Here was his place. Here were the things about which he knew—about which he was sure. With a key, which he always carried, he unlocked the door and entered. The shelves of brightly labeled cans and bottles and boxes, the counters and cases and crates and barrels, in the soft glow of the night lights seemed to be waiting for him.

The familiar smell of coffee and tea and spices was a friendly greeting. The little office, with its varnished pine and window glass partition, made him welcome. His golden oak desk caused him to feel at home. Wearily he dropped into the hospitable arms of his golden oak chair.

And now, again, his thoughts went round the circle—Harry Winton's death—his daughter's condition, as one who had abandoned every pretense of decency—the fact that she had furnished the liquor for the party—her shocking expressions of her attitude toward marriage—her terrible arraignment of her mother—his daughter's relation to Jack Ellory—his wife's relation to Astell. What—*what* should he do about Georgia and Jack? What should he do about his wife and Astell?

The groceryman was aroused from his thoughts by a sound at the rear door of the store. Some one was entering. He listened—sitting very still.

The intruder moved back of the counters toward one of the cash registers.

There was always some money in the till at the close of the day's business—that which was taken in after banking hours, and the change that would be needed for the early morning trade. He distinctly heard the prowler open the till.

Then the thief crossed the room toward the cash register on the other side. The groceryman slipped silently from his chair and, crouching low below the glass upper part of the partition, crept to the door of the office and peered out. Even in the dim night light he recognized Davie Bates.

The delivery boy was making his way back toward the rear door when the groceryman suddenly stepped from the office

and confronted him.

The lad uttered a little cry of dismay.

“Well, Davie?”

The boy’s manner changed to sullen defiance. “What are you doing here at this time of night?” he demanded. “You were laying for me, were you? Well, you can’t take me.” He drew a revolver from his pocket and covered his employer. “You make a move to touch me and I’ll shoot—sure as hell I will.”

Under normal conditions, the groceryman would have felt it his duty to turn the delivery boy over to the law. But that night, after his own shocking experiences, stealing seemed a very little thing. He rather welcomed the incident as a relief from the mental and emotional strain which had so nearly exhausted him. As for Davie’s gun and the threat, which the boy, in his desperate state of mind might easily carry out, Joe was indifferent. He even smiled—a tired smile which puzzled the delivery boy.

“Would you really shoot me, Davie?”

“I will if you force me to. If you was to turn me over to the police, mother would know, and she’d die sure. I’d just as soon be hung for shooting you as to go to the pen knowing that I’d killed my mother, when I was only trying to help her.” He started to back away. “I’m going now. Don’t you make a move till I’m out of that door.”

“Where are you going, Davie?”

Surprised at the groceryman’s kindly tone, the boy stopped. Where *was* he going?

“You can’t get very far, you know,” continued Joe. “I could call the police and they would be after you before you could

go a block. Perhaps you better kill me before you leave. But you must manage to do it without making a noise.”

He was only a boy, and his voice trembled as he said: “I don’t want to hurt you, Mr. Paddock. You’ve been mighty good to me. What did you have to go and show up here tonight like this for, anyway?”

“I know just how you feel about the shooting, Davie,” remarked the groceryman sympathetically. “I thought, this evening, that I would have to kill a man. I didn’t want to, but it seemed the only thing for me to do. Then I thought of something else. I didn’t want my daughter to have a murderer for a father. You don’t want your mother to have a murderer for a son. So you see, killing is not the way out for either of us. On the other hand, if you go and leave me free, you will probably run away and hide, and that would be almost as hard on your mother as shooting me.”

The delivery boy groaned. “Oh, Christ! If you had only stayed away from here everything would have been all right.”

“As for that,” returned the groceryman, “I came here rather unexpectedly to myself. I certainly did not expect to meet you.”

“You didn’t?”

“I give you my word, Davie, I never thought of such a thing. But now that we are both here, suppose we go into the office where we can sit down and talk it over. Maybe we can find the best way out for both of us.”

“Go into your office, where you can call the police? You can’t put that over on me!”

“You have your gun, Davie. I am unarmed. If I try to phone you can stop me.”

The groceryman turned and led the way to the office. The delivery boy followed.

Standing in the doorway with his weapon ready, the boy watched every move as his employer seated himself in his desk chair.

“Sit down, Davie, you look tired. I’m about all in myself.”

As if struck by a sudden thought, the delivery boy stepped into the little room. “Look here, Mr. Paddock,” he said with quick excitement, “you ain’t going to have me arrested. You ain’t even going to fire me. You ain’t going to do nothing about this at all. Because if you *do*, I’ll tell how I’ve been using your delivery car to peddle bootleg liquor, to a lot of your best store customers. I guess they wouldn’t stay your customers long, if what I can tell was to come out in the papers.”

The groceryman was interested. “You have been delivering bootleg liquor to my customers, Davie?”

“I’ll say I have. And I’ve supplied a lot of people who are not your customers, too. It’s easy—with the delivery car—just as if I was taking in groceries. You do anything to me and I’ll give the names and everything. I’ll show up some of these fine Westover swells! Church members, too, a lot of them, and most of them your friends. And that ain’t all. I’ll tell how I delivered liquor to your own daughter, at the club, this very afternoon.”

“So *you* furnished the liquor for my daughter’s party this evening.” The groceryman’s tone was still kindly.

The delivery boy seemed to feel that he was not making the impression he desired. “You can bet I did,” he returned. “I know the crowd she runs with, too—a fine bunch they are! And I can tell some things about married men, with women

they have no right to be with, and married women, with men who ain't their husbands that I've seen at the places where I've gone with booze. Sure as hell, I'll tell it all if you do anything to me. And—and there's your own wife. I saw her at Astell's house the last time I was there. They didn't know I saw them, but I did—they have been chasing around together a lot.”

“I have no doubt, Davie, that you could tell a great many things that people would not care to have known,” said the groceryman calmly.

“You're dead right I can,” returned the boy, “and that's why you ain't going to do anything to me.”

The groceryman carefully thought over the situation, then he said: “As long as you already know so much about my daughter and my wife, Davie, I may as well tell you, that was what brought me down here to-night.”

“How's that?”

“Why, I learned to-night how bad things were in my home. I was walking around, trying to think things out, you know, when I found myself near the store. I came in here to be alone so I could find out what was best for me to do. It was Astell that I was going to kill, when I thought of my daughter Georgia, and saw that wasn't the way out.”

The delivery boy dropped into a chair. He sat there, a huddled heap, looking out at the groceryman from under his wrinkled brows. “Honest to God, Mr. Paddock, I'm sorry for you. I—I'd do anything to help you, if there was anything I could do.”

“Thank you, Davie. It was like this: First Harry Winton, the son of my oldest and dearest friend, was killed. The liquor you sold my daughter did it. Then my girl came home

drunk. And then I learned about my wife and Astell. It is all worked in together—don't you see, Davie?"

The groceryman leaned forward in his golden oak chair and buried his face in his hands.

The delivery boy slipped his revolver into his pocket. "Please, Mr. Paddock, don't let it get you down. Buck up, can't you? I'm not carin' much about Harry Winton but I feel like hell about Miss Georgia—yes, and Mrs. Paddock, too—because they're yours and you've been almighty good to me. Oh, Christ! I wish there was something I could do to help you!"

"It's a help, Davie, just to have some one to talk to about it. I can talk to you because you know."

"I hated to come here to-night, Mr. Paddock. You are the last man in the world I wanted to steal from—after all you've done for me. But you see, sir, it was my only chance. I just *had* to have the money for father and mother and the kids. And me having the key to the back door made it easy. I figured on paying it all back, soon as I could. Honest to God I did!"

"I understand, Davie."

The delivery boy continued desperately: "I hate the bootlegging, too. I don't guess there is anything meaner than that on earth. But, my God, sir, I tell you I just *had* to do something. When I heard mother praying for the Church and the ministers who wasn't turning a finger to help us—and a-thanking God for everything—and her a-going to die in that dirty hole if somebody didn't do something—I just couldn't stand it any longer. I tell you, I just couldn't stand it."

"I don't blame you, Davie. I can see just how it all happened."

“The groceries you’ve been giving us helped a lot,” the boy went on. “But I figured if I could get hold of enough money to move mother and the children into the country somewhere, or anywhere out of Shack Town, and buy a hospital operation for father, we could pull through. Then I would quit peddling booze and pay back what I’d took from you. You see, if mother could get well and father could get fixed up so he could work again, we wouldn’t ask nothing from nobody. We’re not dead beats, nor lazy, nor nothing like that, Mr. Paddock.”

The groceryman was thinking. His mind no longer went round and round that deadening circle. He recalled some of the things Saxton had said at that dinner. He thought of Saxton’s resemblance to that picture of Jesus, and remembered the Master’s words about “the least of these.” He looked at Davie. Surely the delivery boy was one of those whom Jesus had in mind. And then, strangely, he saw Saxton and Jesus and Davie all as one, and felt that somehow in their oneness was salvation from that which had fallen upon his home and loved ones. “Davie,” he said, “I am beginning to see deeper into all this trouble—your trouble and mine. You and I must help each other.”

At the groceryman’s words a light broke over the delivery boy’s face. It was a good face, sensitive, intelligent. He straightened up in his chair. In spite of his half-starved body he seemed a man. It was as if his troubles had aged him by forcing him to think beyond his years, and his employer’s kindness had brought his spirit into the light.

The groceryman continued: “It begins to look as though our troubles all led back to the same source. Perhaps if we get together we can work it out.”

“Yes, sir,” said the delivery boy, with eager readiness.

“Let’s begin at the beginning, Davie. Where do you begin?”

The boy answered promptly: “When father got hurt. He was working on the church, you know. Before that, we were all right. We didn’t live in Shack Town. We had a good home, and I went to school. We all went to church and Sunday school, too.”

The groceryman said slowly: “There was a time when Harry Winton and Jack Ellory and Georgia and their friends all went to Sunday school and church. Then as they grew up they lost interest in religion. The Church couldn’t seem to hold them. Go on, Davie, what next?”

“Well, after father was hurt and couldn’t work, I had to quit school and get a job. Mother and I kept things going but we had to give up our home and move to Shack Town. Then mother got sick and there wasn’t any one but me. And then I—I had to take to bootlegging.”

“Yes,” said the groceryman. “And when the Church didn’t seem able to do anything for Georgia and Harry and Jack, they found other interests that were closely related to what you were forced to do. Your father got hurt working on the church. That much is clear. My daughter got hurt by the Church, too, but just how is not so clear. Something must have happened to turn her against the Church, and because of *that* she turned to other things. Davie, did the Church ever help your family in any way?”

“No, nor any one else in Shack Town. When we couldn’t pay church dues any more, and couldn’t go, they dropped us.”

“My daughter hasn’t been going to church for a long time, but the church hasn’t dropped *her*. Did the Organized Charities ever do anything for you?”

“No, sir, the Charities never did anything for us because I was working, you see. And anyway, if we was to starve to death we couldn’t ask nothing from the city. The professional charity workers the city hires, don’t care a damn about us. They come snooping into our homes asking all sorts of questions that ain’t none of their business, like we was a lot of mangy dogs in the city pound ’stead of human beings just as good as they are. Of course there are lots of folks in Shack Town who do get help from the Charities and it is a good thing that the city does what the Church don’t but generally those that need help the worst don’t get it because they’ve got some pride left, even if they *are* down on their luck. The ones that get the most from the Organized Charities are the ones that make a business of working them. I tell you, Mr. Paddock, it’s the help that is backed by the love, that the preachers are always talking about, that people like my father and mother need.”

“You believe in Christianity, don’t you, Davie?”

The delivery boy answered doubtfully: “I guess so—father and mother still hold to the Church.”

“And yet you tried to help them by bootlegging and stealing. How about that, Davie?”

“Father and mother don’t know nothing about that—that was just *me*. It would kill mother sure if she was ever to know. You see, I planned that when I’d got enough I’d tell them that it came from the Church. That would make mother so happy she would be sure to get well. She would think God

sent the money in answer to her prayers—so it would be all right.”

“Tell me more about this bootlegging, Davie.”

“Well, it was like this: I knew a bootlegger—one of the big ones—that is, I knew who he was. I went to him and told him how I needed the money and how easy it would be for me to deliver his stuff the same time I was delivering groceries for you. But there wasn’t much in it for me. By the time the boss pays all he has to put up to the police and prohibition agents and others, there ain’t so much left for delivering. The boss has to have a profit, of course, or he wouldn’t be in the business. At the rate I was going it would take too long to get the money I had to have, so I—I—came here to-night. As God is my judge, Mr. Paddock, I don’t want to be a bootlegger and a thief. But what could I do—with mother praying for help every night, and no help coming? It ain’t fair—I mean mother praying for God to bless the preachers in their work of saving souls, while I got to peddle booze to church members and steal from you because the Church is letting mother die. And then they all wonder why fellows like me ain’t Christians! You don’t believe I wanted to do what I’ve done, do you, Mr. Paddock?”

“No, Davie, I don’t believe you wanted to do it. I don’t believe my girl really wanted to get drunk and do some of the things she has done. I don’t believe my wife really wanted to ruin our home, and bring shame on our daughter. I think, Davie, we are getting at the real cause of your trouble and of mine.”

“What do you think it is?”

“Well, we know that you became a bootlegger and a thief because the Church did nothing to help your father and

mother—as Jesus certainly meant that Christians should help people. I can't believe that Jesus would force a boy like you to answer your mother's prayer as you have been trying to answer it."

"That's the gospel truth about the Church and me, sir. But what has that got to do with your folks?"

"Why, you see, Davie, my wife, my daughter, the Wintons, all of us, are in trouble because the Church has lost its power to help us with a real religion. People loved Jesus and were influenced by His teaching because of what He was and did to help those who needed help. If the Church to-day was like Jesus people would love it and be influenced by its teaching. The Church is to blame for *your* trouble because it is not like Jesus—because it is not doing as Jesus did—because it is not Christian. And because it is not Christian itself, it has no influence over people—it has no power to make Christian character—it is not helping people like Harry Winton and my daughter and the rest of us to live right. You hate the Church and church people, don't you, Davie?"

"You would, too, if you were in my fix."

"Yes, and my daughter despises the Church. Well—if the Church was helping people like your father and mother, boys like you would love it, and so would people like my daughter. It would help us all, because if the Church actually did what Jesus meant it should do, Christianity would be something real and vital to us, and not just empty form and ceremony and words that mean nothing."

"I tell you, Mr. Paddock, all the folks in Shack Town hate the Church. There is a man talks 'most every night down in our part of the city—he's an atheist and anarchist and all that—you ought to hear him go for the churches and preachers

and them that's supposed to be Christian, and you ought to hear the people cheer what he says. He says the time is coming, sure, when all us poor people in Westover and all over the country will rise up and take the property away from the churches and the rich members, and that we'll run the government to suit ourselves, just like they've done in Russia. He says Jesus, Himself, wouldn't stand for no Shack Town in Westover. Does anybody have any use for the Church, sir? I mean, except the preachers who make their livin' that way, and people that belong because it makes them respectable, and folks like my mother, who are just naturally so good they can't help it?"

The groceryman smiled. "I am an officer in the church where your father and mother were members, Davie."

"Oh, gosh, I forgot!" exclaimed the delivery boy. "But you are a sure enough Christian, sir, or you wouldn't have helped us like you have, and you wouldn't be talking to me here to-night like you are. Yes, sir, you're a Christian all right. But if you're a *Christian* what are you a member of the *Church* for? Oh, hell, I don't know what's the matter! I can't help believing in religion because of mother and father and you. But I can't believe in the Church that mother prays for and you belong to. There must be something wrong somewhere!"

"You are right, Davie, there *is* something wrong. And somebody, somehow, must do something about it. You and I are only two out of millions—think of it, Davie—millions of people in trouble just as bad as ours, and nobody seems to know the real reason for it all or what to do about it! It is a big job, Davie, and I don't know how it is going to be done. But one thing is sure—you and I must stick together and help each other. Will you let me help you, Davie? If I were to offer

your father and mother help, in the name of Jesus and Christianity, they would accept it, wouldn't they?"

"I should say they would! Why wouldn't they? But I can't do anything to help you, Mr. Paddock."

"You *have* done a lot for me, to-night, Davie. And you are going to help me by letting me help you. That sounds funny but it is true. It is like the saying of Jesus that a man can save his life only by losing it."

"I think I understand, sir."

"All right. Then the first thing for us to do is to take care of your folks. I'm going to give you the money. By the way, you better put what you have there back where you got it, so that no one will know what happened here to-night."

With a choking sob, the delivery boy slipped out of the office and the groceryman heard him again at the cash registers.

When Davie returned his employer said: "And that's that! Now I'll tell you how we'll manage. You come to work in the morning as usual—just as if nothing had happened, see? Sometime during the forenoon I'll slip you the money. We'll get some one to take your place for a little while, so you'll have time to fix things up for your folks. Give your bootlegger boss notice that you have quit, so he can notify his customers."

"I know a boy that can take my place delivering for you, Mr. Paddock. He's a good kid, too, and needs the job."

"Fine, Davie, bring him along when you come to work so you can teach him the ropes. Then you and I will run out to the farm and see my father and mother. I am sure they will know of a little place somewhere in that neighborhood that

you can rent, and then you will move your mother and the children. In the meantime, I'll be finding out about doctors and a hospital for your father. There—there—Davie boy, don't cry like that—everything is going to be all right for us both—now that you and I have really got together.”

The sky was just beginning to grow light in the east when the delivery boy crept, by way of the rear door, into his home in Shack Town.

He was stealing quietly to his cot when his mother called: “What are you doing, Davie? Is there anything the matter?”

“No, Mother, I was only getting myself a drink of water. Everything is all right. Can I do anything for you?”

“No, dear, go to sleep. I'm sure that I shall be better in the morning.”

The groceryman stole quietly into his home and went softly upstairs.

At the half-open door of his daughter's room he paused to listen. All was still.

He was preparing for bed when his wife spoke: “What in the world have you been sitting up all night for, Joe? It must be nearly morning. Is Georgia all right?”

The groceryman knew by her voice that she was frightened—wondering if he knew. “Georgia is sound asleep,” he said.

“Oh, Joe—I—I—what in the world are we going to do? What *are* we coming to?”

“Don't worry, Laura. Everything is going to be all right.”

Mrs. Paddock gave a sigh of relief. From her husband's matter-of-fact tone she was sure that he had not heard their

daughter's terrible arraignment. When the groceryman slipped into his bed without coming to kiss her good night she thought it was because he was so preoccupied with Georgia's affair. She missed the customary little token of his love, but was rather glad, on the whole, that he had omitted it.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW VALUES

WHEN the groceryman awoke the next morning his first thought was that it was strange he had slept. He had felt that he would never sleep or rest again. His next thought was that he must be careful. His wife and daughter must not know that he knew about Astell. He must manage, somehow, to hold things as they were until he could find a way to better the situation. If Laura and Georgia knew that he had heard the girl's arraignment of her mother, then he would be forced to make a decision—to act. He must not decide now—he must make no move until he could do so with a feeling of certainty that it was the best possible move to make. His talk with the delivery boy had helped him. It had shown him a light. But the light was still in the distance. He still was uncertain as to just what he should do about Laura. Until he could be sure he must do nothing.

Joe Paddock was not a great man. There was nothing heroic or unusual or superior about him. He was just an ordinary, everyday sort of person.

And so, in common with most of us, when given time to think, the groceryman wanted to do the right thing. The difficulty was to know the right thing to do.

Rising, he set about making himself ready for the day. He moved quietly, for his wife seemed to be asleep. Once he crept softly to the side of her bed to stand for a moment looking down at her and suddenly a wave of hatred for the other man swept over him. He felt weak and sick. To hold to

his plan and for a time, at least, to do nothing, seemed literally impossible. All that he had loved most in life—all that he had worked for—all that he had dreamed, and hoped! His wife's love, his home, his daughter's happiness, his honor! How *could* he endure it in silence and go about as if nothing had happened? The horrid truth itself was forcing him to cry out that he knew. To kill Astell was a necessity. There was nothing that he could plan or do until he had done that one thing which was his right. After he had done that, then whatever followed would not matter.

But even as he turned away from the bed he seemed to hear Davie saying: "Please, Mr. Paddock, don't let it get you down. Buck up, can't you? Oh, Christ! I wish there was something I could do to help you!"

Calmly he finished dressing. His hands were steady. He would see Saxton the first possible moment. But before he could do even that he would help Davie to get started. And he must do what he could for the Wintons. Davie's trouble and the Wintons' grief would keep his mind from Astell, and Saxton would tell him what to do.

Then he was conscious that his wife was watching him. He felt her wondering, fearing, asking herself: "Does he know? What will he do?"

Mrs. Paddock was awake before her husband. When he stood beside her bed she was pretending to be asleep because she was afraid. She was dreading the moment when she must face him. What if he had heard Georgia's arraignment? If he chose, all her world would go to smash. She knew that she would find no refuge in Astell. And Georgia—what would become of her?

It was strange but at that moment Mrs. Paddock loved her husband with something of the love she had felt for him during those first happy years of their married life. Almost she hoped that he *did* know. She wanted to cry out—to tell him, to assure him of her love—to ask him for the sake of their love and for their daughter’s sake to help her back to the realities of her wifehood and motherhood. Would he never finish arranging his tie? She had never known him to be so particular before.

“Good morning, dear,” said the groceryman, in his usual calm, matter-of-fact tone. “The first bell rang ten minutes ago—I’ll run on down and look at the paper.”

The door closed behind him. He did not know—he did not know! Would Georgia tell? No, she decided, if the girl had wanted to do that she would have told long before last night. Georgia had said those terrible things last night because she had been beside herself with drink and the shock of Harry Winton’s death. Poor Mary Winton—she must go to her the first thing after breakfast. But first, without another moment’s loss of time, she must see her daughter. They must arrive at some sort of an understanding before the girl met her father.

Georgia did not come down to breakfast.

Mrs. Paddock said that the girl was sleeping.

The groceryman and his wife ate in silence save for an occasional word or two. They tried to appear natural—as if nothing had happened.

When they left the table Mrs. Paddock set out at once for the Winton home.

The groceryman went upstairs and stood at the door of his daughter's room.

He listened but could hear no sound.

He knocked gently.

There was no response.

Quietly he turned the knob and opened the door an inch or two.

With his lips to the opening he called softly:

“It is daddy, Georgia—may I come in?”

There was no answer.

He opened the door wider.

She was lying very still.

He entered, and tiptoed across the room.

She did not move.

He knelt beside the bed.

Two arms went round his neck and he held her close.

“Oh, Daddy, Daddy, what a mess,” she sobbed.

He comforted her as he had comforted her so many times through all her childhood years.

But the daughter was not so easily deceived as her mother. She knew that her father knew, and she understood why he was pretending ignorance. She realized that for her sake he was playing a game to protect her mother.

And the groceryman saw that his daughter understood. He saw, too, that he could trust her to play the game with him.

There was no danger, now, that the groceryman would kill Astell.

Westover was shocked at the death of Harry Winton. Many who knew the banker's son shook their heads sadly and murmured they were not surprised. But they were depressed by the tragedy, just the same. The Winton family had been identified with Westover from pioneer days. Members of the most influential church, active in civic affairs, the leading banker—in a way, the Wintons *were* Westover. There had never been the least shadow of a cloud over Henry Winton's career—never a hint of scandal—never a suggestion of reproach. The community was sincere in its sympathy for the grief-stricken parents. The newspapers softened the account of the tragedy as much as possible. The ministerial association published resolutions boldly charging the officers of the law with the blame, and demanding that Tony's Place and Sundown Inn be closed and that whoever sold the liquor which caused the death of the banker's son be brought to justice.

In their haste to fix the responsibility upon some one, the ministers did not suggest that perhaps if the Church had not in some way failed to hold Harry Winton, the attractions which led to his death would have had no power over him. The boy was raised in the Sunday school and became a member of the church at an early age. It is significant, too, that the ministers, in their resolutions, made no mention of the country club where so many of their best paying members enjoyed the good fellowship of the locker room.

No one—not even the clergymen, themselves—really believed that the ministerial association would accomplish the closing of Tony's Place or the Inn. No one believed it would make any difference if these places were closed. Everybody expected the ministers to make their charges and

their demands. No one expected them to mention the country club. The ministers, themselves, understood exactly what was expected of them. All of which explains perfectly the power of the Church under the system.

The power of Jesus' teaching to build a Christian character strong enough to withstand Tony's Place and Sundown Inn—*that* is quite another question.

The community made ready for the largest funeral that Westover had seen for years. The prominence of the family and the story of the tragedy insured a record attendance. The undertaker congratulated himself, not only because of his large profits, but upon the advantage gained over rival establishments. The florists reaped abundant harvests, for no one among the banker's business associates cared to have his floral offering inconspicuous. Special singers were hired. In short, nothing was overlooked—no expense was spared. The minister, keenly alive to the importance of the occasion, could be relied upon to do his eloquent best.

The groceryman attended that funeral in a state of mind very different from his usual mental attitude upon such occasions. He had done everything that a friend or a brother could do for Mr. and Mrs. Winton. Because of his lifelong, intimate friendship with Henry Winton, it was almost as if the banker's son were his own. He felt the more deeply, too, because of Georgia's part in the tragedy. But when all was done and they were assembled with the multitude in the church he found himself stepping aside, as it were, and viewing the whole affair impersonally.

The succession of events which followed so quickly that disturbing discussion of religion at Mr. Saxton's dinner had

violently forced the groceryman out of his mental and emotional habits. His whole outlook on life was changed. Harry's death, his daughter's condition, his wife's betrayal of her home, the meeting with the delivery boy—it was as if a terrific explosion had totally wrecked the spiritual edifice which he had built up through the years. He stood on the bare ground amid the ruins of all his inherited and accepted religious conceptions. He saw life with startling clearness—not in the uncertain light of his old church conventions. He must begin all over again. His whole scheme of values was altered. Things which had been of first importance were now insignificant—things which had been trivial were now of vast importance.

As Joe Paddock saw it now, the pomp and show of this particular funeral were monstrous. What, he asked himself, had actually happened to cause this pretentious affair? A poor, worthless wreck of a man—a creature who had never been known to do a useful or unselfish thing, who had sacrificed home, parents and friends to his evil passions, and sunk his own manhood in the mire of sensuality—such a creature had, by his own gross indulgence, been removed from Westover. And the community, which his life had outraged, was now assembled to honor him—why? The worthless clay, from which the spirit was gone beyond all power of church or preacher, was now receiving their tenderest ministries. That theology, which by its confusions had robbed this boy of God, would now assure the grief-stricken parents that all was well with his soul. Those teachers, whose holy privilege it had been to make Harry Winton's character strong with the bread of Jesus' truths but who had starved him with the stones of their silly contentions, would now pray for him.

As the groceryman looked at the wealth of flowers, the minister, the church, the people, and as he listened to the solemn tones of the organ and heard the sweet-voiced singers, he was thinking of the delivery boy and how Davie's crime had been born of his mother's prayer. He seemed to hear again the boy crying: "As God is my judge, Mr. Paddock, I don't want to be a bootlegger and a thief!"

The Church had forced the carpenter's son to become a bootlegger and a thief. The Church, that had neglected Davie, had in another way neglected Harry. And the minister, who was now so eloquently voicing beautiful sentiments over the empty husk of the rich man's drunken son, would howl like a wolf on the track of the poor delivery boy who, in his desperate need, had sold the liquor. Was the delivery boy, who did not want to be a bootlegger, in fact responsible for Harry Winton's death?

For the first time in his life the groceryman felt that he was seeing these things in their true proportions. As he had felt Davie's stealing to be a little thing in comparison with the tragedy in his home, he felt Harry Winton's death to be a little thing. Harry Winton's life—that was the terrible thing. His lack of character—the fact that in a Christian home and community and church such a lack of character could be possible—that was the real tragedy. That the delivery boy should violate the law was nothing compared to the violation of Jesus' teaching which had led to the Church's neglect and indifference and forced Davie into lawlessness. The money represented by the pomp and show of Harry Winton's funeral would have solved Davie's problem—restored his father to health, saved his mother, and permitted the boy to go on with his schooling—thus fitting him for a useful life.

“I am the resurrection and the life,” intoned the minister. Life—life—life—the word echoed in the groceryman’s mind. He wondered: “What is the speaker really thinking about? Is he actually so ignorant of the real values of life?”

As the preacher continued his sermon, eloquent with meaningless phrases and beautiful sentiments, skillfully avoiding facts, shunning the truth and shutting out reason in the name of Him who said: “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,” the groceryman thought: “Suppose the minister should suddenly cry out: ‘Fathers and mothers of Westover, the death of this young man is of little consequence—it is for his life that we should mourn. Because Harry Winton was a weakling he did that which resulted in his death. He lacked strength to meet life because he was not well nourished with character-building food. We who profess the Christian religion are responsible for his weakness. The crime of this poor boy’s life lies at the door of the Church whose mission it is to make men strong with the truths of Jesus’ teaching. Stop this pomp and ceremony—this weeping over the dead clay—and let us mourn that which died while yet he lived. Let us place the blame for the terrible tragedy of his life where it justly belongs.’ ”

The hired singers sang “Nearer, My God, to Thee.”

The groceryman looked around. Henry Winton’s face was the face of a man of stone. Joe knew what his friend was thinking. Judge Burnes met his eye, and he knew that the lawyer’s heart was filled with fear for his own boys. George Riley’s thoughts were of the shame in his own home. Ed Jones was thinking of his daughter. These men, who had been with the groceryman at Mr. Saxton’s dinner, were suffering

through their homes and children even as the groceryman, himself, was suffering.

Suddenly the groceryman knew what he must do.

CHAPTER XV

IN AN UPPER ROOM

THE evening of the third day following that funeral the five men who had been at Mr. Saxton's dinner met in an upper room in the Palace Hotel.

The groceryman received each man with a simple greeting and the words, "I have talked with him. He will be here presently."

They did not, as on that former occasion, appear to be congratulating one another. They spoke quietly, with an air of earnest purpose, as though they had come to some solemn and momentous decision. They seemed to be looking to one another for strength. They were as men resolved upon a great service. Their eyes turned often toward the door.

The groceryman answered a knock at the door, and John Saxton entered.

The men rose to their feet.

Slowly Mr. Saxton looked from face to face—searching, kindly, sympathetic—and they felt the inner strength of the man and sensed his unusual personality.

The groceryman indicated a chair and with a word of greeting to each, Saxton seated himself at the head of the circle.

When the others resumed their chairs, the groceryman remained standing. Without preliminary remarks he said: "We have come to you, Mr. Saxton, because there is no one else to whom we can go. We do not think, now, that it was chance which led you to invite only churchmen to your

dinner, or that it was an accident that each man in the group represented a different church. We were deeply impressed on that occasion by your observations on the whole question of the Christian religion. Since then the community has been shocked by a tragedy which has forced us to realize as never before the imperative need of Christianity and the truth of your presentation of the church situation.

“The community will soon forget Harry Winton’s death. Westover, and the Westover church, will go on in the same old futile way. But we, because of our meeting with you, cannot forget. We cannot go on in the same old way. We have each suffered in our homes and through our children. We are of five different denominational churches but we are one in our needs.

“We have agreed that we cannot go for advice to our ministers. They cannot tell us what to do. We already know exactly what they would say. We do not want soft words of comfort. We do not want theological argument. We want to find a way to make the Christian religion effective in the world of to-day. We are not asking what must we do to be saved, we are asking what can we do to save our homes, our children, our community and nation.

“We do not know how it is to be done, but one thing is clear to us: Before we can do anything we must stop pretending—stop covering things up, stop hiding the truth of things, stop looking at things through our personal prejudice glasses. We must seek facts—face facts—consider facts—and talk clearly and plainly of things as they actually are, before we can ever hope to even begin this work which we desire to undertake.”

The groceryman paused. No one moved or spoke, for it was evident to all that the man was summoning all his strength for that which was to follow.

Then simply, quietly, with no unnecessary words, the groceryman told them what had happened in his home—how the discord and coldness had grown as he had been absorbed in his business and his wife had found other interests—how their daughter had drifted from the Church to follow dangerous ways—and how the crash had come the night of Harry Winton’s death. He told them of Georgia’s drunken condition, of her relation to Ellory, of his wife’s affair with Astell, and how nearly he had come to an act of violence which would have resulted in utter and complete ruin.

It was a terrible thing to hear this man laying bare the shame of his home and loved ones. Often he paused, and seemed to gather strength to continue, while the others sat motionless in tense silence. John Saxton’s countenance expressed his sympathy and understanding.

“I am telling you men nothing which you do not already know,” the groceryman continued. “I have courage to say these things because I am aware of your secret troubles. I have pretended that you did not know my shame, and that I did not know of your troubles, and you have pretended with me. We have been telling polite lies to one another, knowing all the time that no one believed the lies and that every one knew the truth which we were trying to hide.”

He then told how he had met the delivery boy in his store and related their conversation.

“And so I have come to face my personal responsibility,” he continued. “I have pretended to believe that my church was all right, and the church has played the game of pretense

with me. I can make believe no longer. I am faced with the fact that my church, by its neglect of Davie's father and mother, is responsible for Davie's crime, and that because we are not doing this work which Jesus made vital to the Christian religion, our preaching is vain and we have no power to influence our children or protect our homes. As surely as Jesus said, 'This do and thou shalt live,' so surely has the Church, by its failure to teach and *live* the Master's teachings, made the Christian religion a dead thing.

"My wife is not a bad woman—my daughter is not a bad girl. They have simply lost their grip on the realities of life. They are seeing things out of proportion. The teaching of their church is not vital to them because it does not emphasize the vital things. Religion is not, for them, a living force—it is not real. Therefore they have turned to other interests—interests, which, however right they may be when seen in proper proportion, do not in themselves have the character-sustaining power of the Christianity of Jesus.

"I, too, have been confused and have not seen clearly the real values of life. But I know now that it is not the Presbyterianism of my parents that can meet the present-day religious need. Nothing but the truths that Jesus taught can put the world again in touch with God. And so I am ready to throw aside everything but those simple truths. I am ready to abandon every nonessential, and to stand for Christianity with nothing less and nothing more."

When the groceryman had finished, Henry Winton rose to his feet. The banker's face was gray and worn. He fixed his eyes on John Saxton as if pleading for a measure of that strength which they all felt the man possessed. His voice was

low and steady but they knew it was so by a supreme effort of his will.

“My son is dead. You all know how he died. You know the shame of his life. We have all pretended and lied about it. My wife and I, even, made believe and lied to each other and invented all sorts of excuses which we knew did not hide the truth.

“You were with me at the funeral. You saw the expensive flowers, the costly trappings. You heard the wonderful music and the eloquent sermon. I paid for the show. I hired the singers. I employed the preacher who so eloquently covered up and hid the terrible truth of the real tragedy. And all the while I sat there thinking—thinking—thinking. What a ghastly farce it all was!

“The sympathy of my friends is very dear to me but it is not the death of my boy that wrings my heart—it was the shame of his life. It is the awful realization that I am responsible. If my wife and I and our fellow church members had been living the teaching of Jesus, our boy would have found the Christian religion a sustaining influence in his life instead of a thing which he learned to hold in contempt. We of the Church are to blame because there is nothing vital, nothing real and genuine in our religion upon which boys, like Harry, and girls, like Georgia, can take hold. In our efforts to make our church attractive we have devitalized Christianity—we have made it insipid, tasteless, unattractive, meaningless.

“The ministers blame the prohibition officers and demand that the place where the fatal party was held be closed. Their demand is a confession of their weakness. It is a confession

that Tony's Place exerts a more powerful influence than the teaching of the Church.

“We of the Church, I say, are to blame for what has happened in Joe's home. We are to blame for Davie's crime. You are all to blame, with me, for the death of my son. I am to blame for the trouble and shame in your homes. I, too, am ready to clear the decks of every hindering thing and to give the Christian religion a chance. I am hoping, sir, that you can help us to find a way at least to begin.”

Judge Burnes, Mayor Riley and Ed Jones followed, each speaking frankly of the tragedy in his own home and family.

There was no exaggeration, no condoning arguments, no speaking in figures, no veiled allusions, no half-truths, no evasions, no emotional hysteria. Calmly, deliberately, as they might have bared bodily wounds to a surgeon, they stripped off the coverings of conventional pretense and falsehood. They said to one another: “Here is the hurt—this is the shame—this is my right to be included in the brotherhood of those who have suffered.” They spoke with that straightforward reasonableness which would have characterized a discussion by business men of a national crisis or a financial catastrophe. Their spirit was that spirit in which good, capable men, of their type, faced the War. And with it all, though they spoke of personal things, there was an impersonal feeling. There was the feeling that they were not doing this for themselves, alone, but to help one another and to meet a world-wide need.

When the last man had spoken they waited for Saxton. And the interest with which they had hung upon his words at that former meeting, when they had hoped for material gains, was nothing to their interest now.

After all, we really care more for our homes and children than we do for business or possessions. If we seem not to, it is because, in our hearts, we carry on our business and strive for possessions for the benefit of those we love.

Mr. Saxton spoke with quiet meaning. "When Mr. Paddock told me why you wished me to meet with you to-night I felt that the hour for which I have been waiting was at hand."

At these strangely familiar words, the five Westover men looked at one another questioningly. But no one spoke.

The man at the head of the circle continued: "I confess that I did know you were church men when I asked you to dine with me. I had a definite purpose in bringing this particular group of men together and in provoking a discussion of religious conditions. I am satisfied to-night that I made no mistake. I am now ready to make known to you my mission in Westover—the mission in which you have manifested such kindly and patient interest."

Again he paused, and the men exchanged questioning looks. Did Mr. Saxton's words refer to those material interests which had so occupied their thoughts at the previous meeting?

It was Judge Burnes who finally said: "But, Mr. Saxton, is it possible you have misunderstood us? We have not met here to-night to ask you about whatever it was that brought you to Westover. We are here, and we asked you to meet with us, because of the things you said and made us think at our former meeting. You have led us to consider the whole religious question as we had never considered it before and we have come to you for advice on things which are much more vital to us and to our city than any business enterprise which you could possibly place before us. Forgive me, sir,

but I do not think we, to-night, care to hear about the enterprise which brought you to Westover—we do not care to consider your plans for your contemplated Westover investment. Can you not help us in the things for which we have come to you?”

Mr. Saxton smiled. “Have no fear, gentlemen, I understand exactly why you are here. But the first principle of Jesus’ teaching is that our material and our spiritual interests are one and inseparable. Life and religion are identical. The Christianity of Jesus is a religion of the plow, the office, the store, the bank, of government, laws and education. The Christian religion was born in a carpenter shop. It is quite impossible to separate the spiritual from the material and have anything like the religion of Jesus left. The failure of the theologian’s church proves *that*. Denominationalism took religion out of the material affairs of life and made it a thing of sectarian seminaries and ecclesiastical forms. The Christianity of Jesus, for instance, would have saved the world millions of lives, billions of dollars, and all the incalculable suffering of the World War. Would any one contend that no material interests were involved in the War? If the world’s peace is ever to be secured it will not be by courts of human law, leagues of nations, or the cunning of diplomacy, but it will come by this spirituality which was first taught in the terms of common, everyday, material things. Would any one hold that there are no material interests at stake in the question of the world’s peace? There is not a problem touching the so-called worldly affairs of humanity which would not be solved by the application of the spiritual truths which Jesus gave to men.”

The five men sat in amazed silence. All their lives they had been taught to mentally separate their material and spiritual interests. The theology of their denominations was not the religion of a carpenter's shop. They did not know what to say. The magnitude of the vision opened to them by John Saxton's simple words was overwhelming.

Saxton continued: "Because this is not the commonly accepted view of the Christian religion, the one whom I represent thought it would be best not to make the exact nature of his contemplated investment in Westover known until I had first found the men who would understand it. If I have permitted you to think that the proposed investment is of material value only, it was because I could not do otherwise until you were prepared to receive it.

"I represent Mr. Dan Matthews.

"Mr. Matthews plans to invest a considerable sum of money in Westover for the purpose of working out, or helping to work out, these very religious problems which we discussed at our former meeting, and which have now become so vital to you.

"At Mr. Matthews' request I invite you five gentlemen to be his associates—to work with him. But before you accept that invitation it will be necessary for you to meet Mr. Matthews and to consider the plans which he will lay before you."

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLAN

IT was early evening. In that suite of offices high up in the Union Mining Building in Kansas City, old Uncle Zac was busy with broom and dust cloth. Below, and extending mile after mile in every direction, the myriad lights of the city shone in the world of darkness—lights of homes, places of amusement, places of vice, schools, hospitals, police stations, factories—lights to attract, to repel, to warn—lights to lead astray, to confuse, to wreck—lights of hope and promise. And overhead the stars. The roar of the city's life came faintly up from the crowded streets below. Uncle Zac crooned his old-time hymn.

Except for the old negro janitor, the outer rooms of that home of the great Matthews' interests were deserted. But Uncle Zac, as he moved here and there among the desks and chairs and filing cabinets, looked often toward the door of Big Dan's private office. Once he interrupted his low crooning song to mutter: "Hit sure must be mighty 'portant meetin' in thar—yas indeedee. Boss Dan ain't er comin' down here to his offerces, in de night time to meet dem stranger gentlemens, 'cept hit's somethin' big. *No, sah—no, sah!*"

In that inner office, where Big Dan had talked with John Saxton the night of the storm several months before, the groceryman and his four Westover friends were sitting with Saxton about a long table. Every eye was turned toward the man who stood at the head of the table. Dan Matthews was

speaking. The faces of the men and their attitudes of rapt attention gave the impression that, as Uncle Zac conjectured, business of more than ordinary importance was being transacted.

Big Dan's manner was that of one accustomed to dealing with questions of large importance. He was making no effort to appeal to the emotions of his hearers. He spoke with the conviction of one who has arrived at his conclusions after an exhaustive study of facts. His voice was quiet, with no effort at persuasive eloquence.

“It would be impossible to overestimate the value of the contributions to our national life which the Church has made in the past. All that we know of the Christian religion we have received, directly or indirectly, from the Church. The heroism, the sacrifice, the achievements of the church fathers are among the most inspiring records of our country. But the fact remains that, as the Church has grown with the passing years, theological leaders have multiplied and other interests have intruded until to-day, with the greatest potential power in its history, it is less effective for Christianity in the affairs of men than in its early years of material weakness.

“The rapidly increasing irreligion with the consequent trend toward the moral bankruptcy of our nation, to which the Church so often calls our attention, is in itself conclusive proof that the Church is powerless to remedy the situation.

“If the Church denies that it is powerless to meet this crisis, then its denial is a confession of its guilt in permitting these conditions to exist.

“To say that the existing immorality is to blame for the existing irreligion is to reverse cause and effect. Immorality follows irreligion as darkness follows the setting of the sun.

“To find the reason for the Church’s failure, we decided to make a study of actual conditions in a representative American community. Then we would attempt to work out in that same community a remedy; thus making a demonstration which would be applicable to the country as a whole.

“Westover, with its population of 40,698, in its culture, traditions, civic, social, business and church life, fairly represents the average American community. Mr. Saxton finds that the alarming conditions resulting from the irreligion of the people in Westover are typical of the conditions throughout the nation. If you wish detailed and reliable information as to what is actually going on among your young people of the high-school age, read Judge Lindsey’s *The Revolt of Modern Youth*. His findings are based upon actual cases which have passed through his court in Denver over a period of twenty-five years, and apply to every city in the land. Your churches, too, are fairly representative. The figures which I am about to submit to you check with the averages of all the cities between twenty-five and fifty thousand in the United States.”

The groceryman and his friends leaned forward with intense interest.

Referring to the typewritten sheets on the table before him, Big Dan continued:

“The Christian religion is represented in Westover by eighteen separate and distinct denominations or sects. The combined membership of these eighteen denominations is 21,409. In other words, over fifty per cent of your population is identified with the various church organizations in your city.

“To put it another way, you have one church member for every individual nonchurch member in Westover. And this does not take into account the large number of professed Christians who are not identified with any denominational organization.

“Gentlemen, human nature is to-day what it was in the day of Jesus. Licentiousness, crime, political graft and injustice are not modern inventions. When the Christian religion was first given to men, twelve Christians upset the world and brought into human affairs a spiritual force which made its mark on every page of human history. With the simple truths of Jesus’ teaching, twelve men stood against the world and won. The religion, which the man of Galilee taught by wayside well, in the fields, the village streets and on the mountain, became more potent in the world than the armies of Rome. Twelve Christians against the world! But to-day, in Westover, with twelve church members for every twelve people not identified with the church, the professed followers of Jesus cannot withstand or check the increasing irreligion of the people. The Church cannot, in fact, influence to any marked degree, the lives of its own members.

“The Church, itself, would scarcely hold that the teaching of Jesus is not a certain remedy for irreligion. Therefore we cannot escape the conclusion that for some reason the Westover church is not adequately presenting the Christianity of Jesus to the modern world.”

Big Dan took another typewritten sheet from the pile on the table before him.

“Referring again to Mr. Saxton’s report, and keeping in mind that these figures are the averages for cities of this class

throughout the United States, consider first the strength of the Westover church as it is expressed in property.

“There are in Westover forty-four church edifices. With their furnishings, organs, lots, parsonages and so forth, the total property value is \$2,559,494.08.

“The total seating capacity of these forty-four edifices is 20,321 or one edifice for every 461 possible worshipers.

“But, gentlemen, the total average attendance at the regular services of the church in Westover is 4,845. In these forty-four places of worship there are, at the average regular services, 15,476 empty seats.

“In other words, the Westover church has put \$2,559,494.08 of its money strength into forty-four edifices in order that there might be one edifice for every 110 worshipers.

“Can you imagine any company of sane business men building, in your city, forty-four separate theaters to accommodate an average attendance of 110 persons each, and with a total seating capacity of only 461 each?

“As I shall show you later, these forty-four edifices represent a waste of \$1,059,494.08. Multiply this by the thousands of cities and communities throughout the country and the waste of the Church’s money strength in useless property is appalling.

“Consider now the operating cost of the Westover church, under this system which furnishes one place of worship for every one hundred and ten worshipers. By operating cost, I mean, the local running expenses—janitor, fuel, lights, ministers’ salaries and the general denominational organization expense, such as salaries of bishops and secretaries, office expense, and so forth. This operating cost

throughout the country, by the way, is eighty-five per cent of the total expenditures of the Church.

“The annual running expense of the Westover church is \$137,732.19.

“This, as I shall show you later, is a total loss.

“Nearly one-half of the church’s money strength, as it is represented in property, is wasted and every cent of the annual running expense is literally thrown away.

“The preaching strength of the Westover church is more important than its property cost or running expense.

“The truths of Jesus, which constitute the Christian religion, must be taught. Jesus, Himself, was, first, last and always, a teacher. To all who accepted His teaching, He committed His truths in trust for the succeeding generations. The Church—that is, the whole body of Christians—has no other reason for existing save to teach, by its preaching and by its activities, those truths which Jesus gave to His immediate followers and through them to the world.

“The power of the Christian religion to lead mankind to a consciousness of God, and to engender and foster character-building principles and ideals, is in the personality, the teaching and the life of Jesus. Jesus, Himself, placed it there: ‘I am the way, the truth and the life.’ ‘Learn of Me.’ ‘No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.’ The emphasis is unmistakable.

“Well, forty-four ministers of the Westover church, at their average regular Sunday services, preach to 4,845 persons, which is an average of 110 souls for each teacher. And yet any one of these ministers could easily preach to two or three times the entire church-going population of the city.

“But, gentlemen, these forty-four teachers of the Christian religion—each with his little company of one hundred and ten people who look to him for those living vitalizing truths which Jesus committed to his followers in trust for all mankind—these forty-four teachers represent eighteen denominations. *They must, therefore, deliver at least eighteen different messages.*

“It is idle to say that these preachers all teach the same thing, because if they all taught the same thing they could not represent eighteen separate and distinct denominations. It is as idle to say that these ministers do not represent their several denominations, because if that were true these eighteen different denominations would not exist.

“With the imperative needs of eighteen competing denominations demanding the largest possible audiences, the ministerial effort to draw a crowd of hearers results in a ruinous neglect of Jesus’ teaching—the necessity of presenting these denominational differences leads to a substitution of theological views for Christian truths—the confusion, to those who would learn of Jesus, is disastrous—the result in irreligion is tragic.

“Mr. Saxton, in his report, gives a list of the subjects discussed by your religious teachers in Westover during the last six months. As these subjects were announced in the papers by the ministers themselves, we may assume that they consider them of religious importance. If a person advertises that he will lecture on dogs, the people certainly have the right to assume that the lecturer will endeavor to teach them something about dogs.

“These subjects, which the preachers of Westover have presented to the public for their spiritual inspiration and

guidance, range from baseball to traffic regulations. There are several discussions of evolution. There are many presentations of the various sectarian interests. There are sermons of historical, political, economic, artistic, literary and scientific interest. There are a number of Biblical subjects, such as, ‘Who wrote Isaiah?’ and ‘Where did Cain get his wife?’ *Not one subject in five suggests that a preacher of the Christian religion will deal directly with the personality, the teaching, or the life of Jesus.*

“But even these advertised sermon subjects, calculated as they so evidently are to draw an audience at any cost, occupy an insignificant position in the general program of attractions offered. Jazz bands, instrumental solos, orchestras, singers, are all played up with portraits, headlines, and blurbs as the leading entertaining or amusing features offered by the various churches where the people theoretically gather to worship God as He is revealed in Jesus, and to receive from their spiritual teachers those truths which alone have power to build Christian character.

“Think what this means, gentlemen! With the God of Jesus to worship, the modern Church is offering jazz bands and motion pictures as its chief attraction! With Jesus, Himself, to present to men, the ministers advertise amusing, humorous and clever entertainments! With the happiness of our homes, the future of our children and the very life of the nation depending upon the saving, keeping powers of the Christian religion, our church teachers strive to make the people laugh!

“It is not difficult to account for those empty seats in the Westover churches. It is easy to understand why the people seek entertainment in those places which the ministers condemn as worldly.

“Men have always found God in the personality, teaching and life of Jesus. Men are not finding God in the preaching of the modern Church.

“Nothing could be farther from the spirit and example of Jesus than the spectacle of a down-to-date clergyman struggling to raise the money for his salary. Nothing could be less Christian than the antics of a modern pulpit entertainer striving, with thrills, sensationalism and humor, to draw a larger crowd with larger box-office returns than the other places of amusement against which he rails.

“The personality of Jesus compels respect, admiration, love. His teaching had the force and authority of eternal truth. The methods of our modern ministers breed contempt, disgust, and scorn. Their sermons have no more authority than a vaudeville performance.

“Take Jesus out of the Christian religion and your religion is no longer Christian. To the degree that our preachers magnify theology they belittle Christianity. In substituting their denominational interests for the simple teaching of Jesus, they have lost their power to bring their hearers face to face with God.

“In the bewildering maze of theological opinions, doctrinal discussions, sectarian interests, and denominational ambitions, the central idea—the strength and simplicity of Jesus’ teaching—has been lost. The emphasis has been shifted from the living, eternal, character-building truths which the Master gave us, and placed upon theological nonessentials of which Jesus never spoke.

“These theological differences, which were never contemplated by Jesus and are not of His teaching, take ninety-five per cent of the preaching strength of the Church.

And yet they have no more to do with the Christian religion than an electric eel has to do with an electric street car. You could as easily operate your Westover street car system by propagating electric eels as you can make the teaching of Jesus effective in your city by promoting denominationalism.

“The tragedy of this situation is that it is not chargeable to the ministers, themselves. In all the world there is no body of men more Christ-like, as a whole, than are these preachers of Christianity. They are, in general, fit and capable in natural endowments, in personal character, personal devotion and personal sacrifice. The fault lies not with the teachers but with the system under which they are compelled to teach. The ministers, themselves, are the helpless victims of their denominational machines.

“Many a minister faces his audience with a heavy heart because he longs to teach the simple, unassailable, character-building, saving truths which he has from his Master, and for which he knows the people hunger. But he cannot. The material needs of his denominational church are imperative. He must put the sectarian interests of his pulpit first or yield his pulpit to some leader who will. If the ministry of the Church were to concentrate upon the teaching of Jesus, denominationalism, with its wasteful and destructive competition, would cease.

“The people heard Jesus gladly. The people hear our modern teachers of religion laughingly. But show these teachers the way to freedom and they will lead the world to God. Set these same ministers free from the shackles of their denominationalism and they will present Jesus to the world to-day with the irresistible power which gave the twelve their victories.”

“Consider another element of the Church’s strength—the activities of the membership.

“No one of the most ordinary intelligence can fail to understand what Jesus taught as the essential activities which should engage the strength and time of Christians: ‘For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me....’ ‘A cup of water in my name.’ ‘Sell and give to the poor.’ ‘The Good Samaritan’—these and many other sayings, with innumerable examples, reveal the mind of the Master with unmistakable clearness.

“The citizens of Westover last year, in the name of the city and of various clubs and lodges, gave nearly \$100,000 to those of whom Jesus said: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’ But your forty-four churches gave not one penny to minister unto those of whom Jesus said: ‘Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.’

“But while the Westover Church, in the name of the Christian religion, had no part in ministering unto the poor with whom Jesus so unmistakably identified Himself, in the names of its eighteen denominations it spent the strength and time of its membership in activities to raise this sum of \$137,732.19 for its running expenses, which, as I have shown, was worse than wasted.

“Mr. Saxton gives a list of these activities as they were extensively advertised in the papers and enthusiastically promoted by the ministers and church members—card parties, balls, entertainments, banquets, vaudeville shows,

rummage sales, Oriental bazaars, fairs and lotteries were all carried on for the sole purpose of raising money to maintain the different denominational institutions.

“By no stretch of the imagination can we hear Jesus say: ‘Come unto me and play a game of cards, for inasmuch as ye win ye glorify my name,’ ‘Come all ye who desire a good time and join our jitney dance—the proceeds are to buy a pulpit carpet,’ ‘Come unto our Oriental bazaar and buy of the cigarette girls in costume, for the price ye give will help to pay our pastor’s salary.’ And in the meantime, *while the strength of the church membership is spent in these activities, the Church’s own poor and needy are cared for by the civic charities, the Elks, the Kiwanis and other organizations.*

“The effect of this policy of the modern Church is obvious. If the \$137,732.19, which the Westover church last year threw away on its denominationalism which is making the teaching of Jesus of no effect, had been used by the Christian workers in ministering to the city’s poor, Westover would have no religious problem. As surely as the loving sympathy of Jesus for suffering humanity won the world to His teaching, so surely would the same sympathy and kindness in His name win Westover to Christianity. If the membership strength of the Church were given to personally ministering to these sick and suffering ones the world would bow before the Church in love and adoration as it bows before Him who went about doing good.

“As in the waste of the teaching strength, the tragedy is that these silly, trivial, ineffectual activities use the *best* strength of the membership. It is not a weakness of the people; it is a misuse of their strength by denominationalism. Most often it is the Christian zeal of these workers which

leads them to engage in these enterprises. *That this Christian zeal should be forced by denominationalism to spend itself in such activities while the work to which Jesus committed Himself and His followers is undone—this is the tragedy.*

“This same waste is found in what is generally known as the ‘young people’s work.’

“The young people’s societies, under the guidance of the church leaders, all stress loyalty to their parent denominations. The young people of the Church are taught that to serve Jesus they must serve a denomination. In all of their activities a good time is stressed, the argument being ‘join our society because with us you will have more fun than you will otherwise.’ The policy is to make the Christian religion attractive by emphasizing the good times of the social activities.

“Consider this full-page newspaper advertisement of what the Church is offering young people. It is headed: ‘Flaming Youth. Get This New Thrill.’ ‘You say you are after the big time stuff. Then why don’t you come into the main tent?... Be a sport and give Him a chance. He will not take the fun out of life. He will add to it... If He should fail in your case *you will have lost nothing* and the experience will at least give you something to talk about. Come to Church. Come to Sunday school. Come to Young People’s Meeting.’

“Certainly there is nothing in Jesus’ teaching to take the joy out of life. But it is as certain that Jesus never based his appeal to the world upon social pleasures, good times, or fun.

“Our Young America of to-day is a remarkably keen, observing and wide-awake Young America. Its frankness is astounding. Its intolerance for sham and pretense is its greatest strength. With amazing impudence it questions

everything. It is in active revolt against all authority that is not backed by reality. It may not know it but it is seeking everywhere and trying everything in an effort to find truth, in which alone is freedom.

“Make no mistake, Young America is rejecting the Church because it sees through the pretenses, shams and failures of denominationalism.

“The modern Church, by inviting Young America to accept the Christian religion for fun, has driven Young America to seek its fun elsewhere. Young America will be drawn to the Christian religion when the truths of Jesus are taught with the sincerity and simplicity of the Sermon on the Mount, and when the activities of the Church are those activities in which the Master, Himself, engaged.

“Under the stress of denominational competition, the Church has sought to make religion attractive by eliminating the elements of its strength. But the modern system has not made religion attractive, it has made it insipid.”

“One other element of the Church’s strength remains to be considered—worship.

“By worship we understand the act of adoration or homage toward the being worshiped; the contemplation of, surrender to and spiritual communion with God; a conscious yielding of the worshiper, a giving of one’s self to the divine principle. Any candid, honest and unprejudiced observer will be forced to admit that worship, in this sense, has little place in our modern Church.

“At a cost of over two and a half million dollars, the Westover Church has built forty-four so-called places of worship. Forty of these temples to the God of the Christian

religion have no beauty, no dignity, no distinction. They are as commonplace and lacking in architectural significance as your warehouses, coal sheds and lumber yards. They have no more religious meaning than your barber shops. They are fitting monuments to the denominationalism which built them.

“Under this system of ruinous competition, the modern church edifice is everything else but a place of worship. It is a place of entertainment, a social center, the headquarters of a theological camp, a parade ground for the display of denominational strength, an amusement hall, a show house. The spirit of the announcements and advertisements of the services is the spirit of the invitations to the motion-picture theaters, the dance halls and the restaurants. The spirit of the preaching is the spirit of entertainment, of seeking to please. The spirit of the music is the spirit of the concert hall or opera. The spirit of the church activities is the spirit of a social event, an afternoon tea, or a club affair. *To the degree that the material necessities of the competing theological systems have eliminated Jesus, the modern Church has banished the spirit of worship.*

“The essential element of worship is the offering. It has been so in all religions, whether the offering be fruit or flowers, an animal or a human being. Whether the offering was made by Aztec or Hottentot or Maori, the religious significance has been the same. It has remained for the modern denominational church to do away with offerings to God as acts of worship, and to substitute membership dues, pew rentals and public collections to pay the preacher and defray the expenses of the sectarian institution.

“The spirit which characterizes the taking of the so-called offerings at the typical church service to-day is not the spirit of worship. The act is more often comparable to the passing of the hat by a street performer following his free entertainment. If the person who has been drawn to the meeting by the advertisements is pleased with the program, he pays. If he is not pleased he does not pay. If a member likes the pastor he subscribes to his support. If the members are not pleased with their minister they withhold their subscription and the man of God answers a call to some other community.

“To see God through the personality, teaching and life of Jesus, and to see Jesus in that humanity with which He identified Himself—and then, in the spirit of Jesus’ ministry, to give money for the relief of those who are naked and hungry and sick, as an offering to God—this is the essential element of Christian worship. But such worship, if restored to our modern religious gatherings, would wreck the denominationalism which lives on membership dues, the earnings of the church activities and the ability of the ministers to please their congregations and to draw pennies from the pockets of a more or less appreciative public.”

“To sum up this analysis: The irreligion of the present day is directly chargeable to the lack of Christianity in the modern Church. This lack of Christianity is the result of the substitution of theological differences for the teaching of Jesus. The appalling immorality of our generation is chargeable to the denominationalism which rendered the Church powerless to meet our religious needs.”

There was silence for a little, then Mayor Riley said: “But, Mr. Matthews, are not all the Christian denominations founded upon the Bible, or rather, I should say, upon the New Testament?”

Big Dan answered: “The theological differences, which constitute this denominationalism, have grown out of the teachings of men who wrote years after Jesus’ death. They have not grown out of what Jesus, Himself, said, and, by personal example, taught. For instance, there are no divisions based upon Jesus’ teaching: ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’

“If this denominationalism is in fact a necessity of the Christian religion, then Jesus was incompetent and short-sighted, because nowhere, in all His teaching, is there a suggestion that His followers divide into one hundred and eighty-three sects. On the contrary, when His darkest hour was at hand and He summed up His personal ministry and teaching, He prayed that all who believed in Him might be *one*—‘as thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.’ And He gave as a reason for this prayer ‘*that the world may believe.*’ It follows that Jesus knew if Christians were not one, the world would not believe. The present-day irreligion, which results from the lack of Christian oneness, is proof again that Jesus was wiser than our theologians.”

Said Judge Burnes: “Granting the accuracy of Mr. Saxton’s observations and the justice of your analysis, is it not also true that, under all these differences of denominationalism, there is a oneness of spirit?”

“How is it possible, Judge, to have oneness of spirit without oneness in fact? The Westover Church is, *in fact*, not

one but eighteen. How can these eighteen, in fact, result from anything but a corresponding lack of oneness in spirit?

“Devotion to Jesus, worship of God as He is revealed in Jesus, loyalty to the teaching of Jesus—these are not the tests of fellowship in any one of the denominations. A person is not received into a denominational church because he is a Christian, but because he is willing to accept the peculiar tenets of that sect. He may be ready to die upon a cross for the Christian religion, but that sacrifice would not admit him to membership in a denominational brotherhood. Therefore it is clear that the modern Church, in the essentials of Christianity, is not placing the emphasis where Jesus placed it.

“But let us assume that in some mysterious theological way these eighteen competing organizations in Westover, with their forty-four edifices and their forty-four ministers and their forty-four groups of one hundred and ten worshipers, *are* one in spirit. It still remains that it is not oneness of spirit which characterizes them before the world. *The world accepts or rejects the Church for what it is, not for what its theologians assume its theoretical and invisible spirit to be. And mark you, the world accepts or rejects the Christian religion as it sees it in the Church. If that oneness in spirit did in reality exist, then that spirit of oneness would in itself do away with the existing fact differences which are so clearly making the Christian religion of no effect.*”

“Do not all the churches engage in Christian work, Mr. Matthews?” asked the groceryman. “What about our benevolences, schools, orphans’ homes, hospitals and such institutions?”

“I should have explained,” returned Big Dan, “that the figures given apply to local work only. The benevolences, schools, missions and similar works of the Church are all denominational and are maintained in the name of, and in the interest of, the denomination. And at that, these benevolences throughout the country are only fifteen per cent of the total expenditures of the Church, as against eighty-five per cent for running expenses.”

“We hear a great deal about church union,” remarked Henry Winton. “Some of the denominations in Westover have been trying for years to get together.”

“Yes,” returned Big Dan, “but as I have said, the denominations are not built upon the teaching of Jesus, they are formed about various distinctive theological theories, views or central thoughts. These various sectarian institutions do not go directly to Jesus as the source of their distinctive doctrines. Taking them at their own terms, their origin is not Jesus; it is Calvin, or Wesley, or Luther, or Campbell. We cannot produce the Christianity of Jesus by union of all the theological differences which were not founded upon His teaching—we would still have only a compromise of Calvin, and Wesley, and Luther, and Campbell, and the rest of them.

“If you could have made all the tallow candles, and whale-oil lamps, and kerosene lamps, into one great lamp you still would not have produced an electric arc light. The electric light did not come by uniting the other lights. It came by applying a different principle of lighting. It came by going directly to the great source of electric light.

“No existing denomination can set the Christian religion free, because the moment it gave one hundred per cent of its strength in property, preaching, activities and worship to the

teaching of Jesus, it would lose its denominational identity and cease to exist.

“Denominations will end, not by uniting them but by abandoning them. They will go as the candles and whale-oil and kerosene lamps went, when the electric light of Jesus’ teaching is made available to the world.

“And this, gentlemen, is exactly the central idea of the plan which I have to propose.”

“The only possible remedy for the increasing irreligion and the moral bankruptcy which threaten our country is somehow to ignore this denominationalism which has arisen, and make available to the world the full value of the Christian religion.

“Christianity is Jesus—nothing less, nothing more. Jesus made God understandable. The direct, simple, vital truths with which Jesus won men to Himself, and through Himself to God, will restore to the American people their consciousness of God.

“The hope of humanity is in the fact that the great majority of church members are already sick, tired and disgusted with denominationalism. We go on in the same old way, inadequate as we know it to be, because we know no better way. Our church leaders and teachers are barred, by their training and their obligations to their denominational pulpits, from leading the people away from the cause of all the sectarian evils, from which to be released they pray. It is clear, therefore, that any movement away from denominationalism and toward a simple, direct and understandable Christianity must be inaugurated by the lay members and not by the clergy.

“Any plan to effect the freedom of the Christian religion must be, in a way, experimental, in that while it looks toward the ideal, it must never be held to be in itself ideal, or perfect, or final. Obviously, the experiment must be such that the plan will prove itself by actual, tangible results, and not rest its claim to recognition upon untried theories, unproved propositions, or intangible returns. The experiment must deal with actual conditions—normal conditions.

“As I have said, the first step was to find a community which would most adequately represent the conditions throughout the country as a whole. The second step was to find the men. I say men, because no one person, by setting himself up as an inspired reformer, could ever, in this enlightened day, accomplish the desired end.

“As the experiment requires a representative place, it calls for a representative group of men. These men must be Christians. They must be active members of different denominational churches—sufficiently prominent in church affairs to be well identified with their denominations by their fellow-citizens. They must be prominent in business, meriting the confidence of the people in matters or questions of judgment—leaders in civic affairs. They must, so far as possible, represent the different business, political and professional interests. They must be men of families—fathers. And last”—Big Dan’s voice was gentle—“they must have suffered from the irreligion which is everywhere causing such suffering.

“To demonstrate how the Church’s money strength is wasted in church property: The plan is to build, in Westover, three edifices which, it is hoped, will take the place of the forty-four now in use. To simplify the experiment, the plan is

to start with one, in the district where the largest of your denominational houses are now located. The other two will be built later, where they will be most accessible to the remaining portions of the city.

“To make the experiment or demonstration most effective, each of these temples is to have a seating capacity of at least 5,000, which, you will note, would give the three edifices a total seating capacity of *more than three times the total average attendance of the present forty-four places of worship*. These three temples are to cost \$1,500,000, or \$500,000 each, *which is more than eight times the cost of the average church edifice now in Westover*. They are to be architecturally worthy of their holy purpose—beautiful—significant—dignified—impressive—distinctive—not unsightly, ill-kept shacks—not cheap adaptations of the architecture of business.

“These temples must be as sacred to worship as the mosque of a Mohammedan, or the temple of a Hindu. They must never be closed, night or day, in order that those who feel the need of communion with God may enter at any time for meditation or prayer or relief from the rush and distractions of our modern life.

“These places of worship will not be identified by any names of denominational character. They will memorialize no one but Jesus. They will call to mind only the Christian religion. They will be holy ground—sacred to the worship of God as He is revealed in the personality, the teaching and the life of Jesus.

“Of the \$2,559,494.08 now represented by your present forty-four Westover church edifices, the \$1,500,000 cost of these three proposed temples would save \$1,059,494.08. This

amount invested at five per cent would yield an annual income of \$52,974.70, which would give, for the annual operating expense of each temple, \$17,658.23, or more than five times the annual running expense of each one of the forty-four edifices now maintained by the present system.

“This, you see, would effect a saving of the total annual running expense of the present denominational system, which is \$137,732.19, and enable the Christian people of Westover to spend that amount annually for the relief of the poor, in the name of the Christian religion.

“Which would Jesus have His followers in Westover do—spend \$137,732.19 every year to maintain eighteen divisions of His followers, or spend that amount annually in ministering to those who are naked and hungry and sick and homeless? Which plan would make the Christian religion most effective among men?”

“The temple ministers will be free to preach the teaching of Jesus only.

“These teachers of the Christian religion will not be dependent upon their congregations for their material needs because the endowment of \$1,059,494.08 will provide for them and for all other running expenses. The people will understand clearly that neither the ministers nor the temples receive one penny from the public or from any individual. These preachers will feel no *financial* necessity for drawing a crowd. There will be no *temptation or need* for them to substitute anything as an attraction, either for personal or denominational interest, for the simple presentation of Jesus. With this freedom, they will face the wealthiest and the poorest, the most influential and the unknown, with a sense

of independence which will enable them to present the Christian religion without hesitation or reservation, and with the authority of untrammelled truth. With no denominational masters or overlords to support and satisfy; with no personal money interest in his audiences; knowing that he is not dependent upon the favor of any one of his hearers, *each minister will be free to center his whole strength upon the one thing, and will teach nothing but the truths which Jesus taught.*

“Each temple minister will give all of his time and strength and talents to his ministry of teaching. He will not need to devise and promote schemes for raising money. He will not engineer campaigns and drives; he will not need to make himself a social favorite in certain circles; he will not be a booster for civic enterprises, or lend himself to politics. But in addition to his public preaching, this minister will be accessible to those who are in need of his counsel and advice—a spiritual leader, guide, counselor and teacher, in constant, intimate touch with the people’s needs, as free to devote himself to this ministry as Jesus, Himself, was free—free to declare without fear or favor those truths which reveal God and which, if so declared, will make God a vital force in the lives of the people.

“The only way to free Christianity from the theological machines is to have no machine. Therefore these temples and these ministers will represent no organization.

“There will be nothing for any one to join; nothing for any one to support; nothing for the people to run or operate. With no membership dues, no allegiance to any organization, there will be no prominent members, no personal influence, no rich, no poor. These temples and their ministers will be as

free from any spirit of denominationalism as the Christian religion itself.

“Do you think that the people of Westover would go, under such conditions, to hear such preaching?”

“In these temples—through the teaching of these ministers—the spirit of worship will be restored and the offering given its rightful place as an act of worship.

“The people will be taught, as Jesus taught them, to make their offerings to God as he is represented in humanity. They will give to this essential act of worship the significance and meaning which Jesus gave to it, and make it again a vital thing in the Christian religion.”

“With the endowment providing for the minister and the temple, *every penny of the offerings will be used in ministering to those with whom Jesus identified Himself*, and the people, knowing that their gifts are used to relieve the city’s sick and suffering poor in the name of the Christian religion, will attach a new and deeper meaning to their contribution to Christianity.

“Under this plan the Christian people in Westover will not waste their strength and time in activities for the purpose of raising money to support competing denominational institutions, but they will engage in administering the temple offerings. They will go among the needy ones of Westover, not as hired agents of the city, but as representatives of Jesus, with personal Christian interest, engaging in the work which Jesus made so essential to Christianity.

“With houses of worship worthy of the Christian religion, sacred to the cause which they represent, and free from the atmosphere of sectarianism; with a teacher free to teach,

without fear or favor, the truths of Jesus, and with time to minister to the spiritual needs of the people; with the spirit of worship restored and the offerings given their rightful place in that worship; with the poor of the city cared for in the name of Christianity; and with the Christian people free to do a Christian work in the community, the oneness of Jesus' followers in Westover would become a fact—the religion which Jesus gave to the world would become real and effective.”

“I believe,” said Judge Burnes, “that such a demonstration of Christianity would be irresistible—it would Christianize Westover in a year—it would make itself felt in *every life, every home, every business, every school in the city.*”

The groceryman added thoughtfully: “If, under such conditions, the people failed to respond then we would be forced to conclude that Christianity itself is a failure.”

“Every sincere Christian, I think, dreams of such a place of worship, longs for such teaching, and hopes for such a Christian work,” said Banker Winton. “We cannot question the result of such an enterprise. But, Mr. Matthews, your own analysis shows that it would be humanly impossible to persuade all of the Westover churches to abandon their separate organizations and unite in such a movement. And even if the local organizations, by some miracle, *could* be persuaded, their denominational organization would not permit it.”

“That is true, Mr. Winton. Therefore, to make this experiment possible and so demonstrate to the world the real power of the Christian religion when freed from denominationalism, I propose to establish in Westover a

foundation.” He smiled. “This is the investment which I wish to make in your city, gentlemen, and you are all invited to come in on the ground floor. In short, as others have established foundations in the interest of art, and science, and education, I desire to establish this foundation in the interest of the Christian religion.

“To make this experiment a real demonstration, the amount of the foundation will be the exact sum now represented by the cost of the forty-four edifices and their properties now operating in Westover. As I have shown, this sum will be sufficient to build the temples and to furnish ample income to provide for their running expenses for all time to come.

“I have asked you gentlemen to consider these things which I have put before you, because it is my wish that you will act as trustees of this foundation, which must not even bear my name. I suggest that it be called simply the Westover Church Foundation.”

There was no mistaking the answer which the five Westover men were ready to make. They sat in silence, with bowed heads, too deeply moved for words.

“Before you accept this work, gentlemen,” continued Big Dan, “it would be well, I think, for us to take up some of the objections to the plan which are sure to be raised.”

Judge Burnes asked: “Might not the plan be, in effect, only another denomination? Other movements for undenominational Christianity have been inaugurated in the past, but they have always resolved themselves into distinct sects with all the effect of the denominationalism from which they proposed to be free.”

“That is true, Judge,” returned Big Dan, “but those movements, or as they are more often termed, ‘reformations,’

have always centered about the personality and leadership of some individual. They have taken the leader's name, or the name of the particular doctrine which he championed. They became distinct denominations because they organized and made membership in the organization necessary. As separate bodies, they entered into competition with other denominations in order to promote their particular views, and so they became, as you say, only other denominations.

“This plan is not a reformation; it is not coming out of any of the existing organizations; it is not to be built around the ideas of any individual; it calls for no distinctive body of worshipers; it will have no distinctive name; there will be no organization formed about any one or anything; there will be nothing for any one to join, nothing to support, nothing distinctive; it will antagonize no existing order—it will simply present to the world the teaching of Jesus, and it will present nothing else. It will be no more sectarian than the Sermon on the Mount.”

“But how can it be managed without organization?” asked Mayor Riley.

“How was the Christian religion which Jesus gave to the world managed in His day?” returned Dan. “Very few of the denominational churches to-day contend that one must be a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or a Congregationalist in order to be Christian. Do you five men, of five different denominations, not recognize one another as Christians? One is a Christian because one worships God as he is revealed in Jesus, which means, if it means anything, accepting the teaching of Jesus as the guiding principle in all the affairs of life. Jesus set up no human organization which men must join. He devised no machine to which men must belong and

which they must support. All Christians are certainly free to hold individual ideas, but no man is free to make his individual ideas necessary to the Christian religion, or to build about himself a separate and distinct organization which makes the teaching of Jesus of no effect, and defeats the end for which Jesus came.”

“How would it be possible, without organization, to conduct the necessary business?” asked Banker Winton.

Dan answered: “The Foundation would, of course, be a legal corporation. The trustees or stewards would administer the funds. They would, for their business operations, provide whatever organization was necessary. That is why the plan calls for experienced and skillful business men to serve in that capacity. *But such organization would not in any way be a denomination which people would be asked to join, to which they would pay dues, or with which they would become identified as members.* It would be a business, not a theological organization.”

The groceryman asked: “And where would we find such a minister?”

Big Dan’s answer came heartily: “Thousands of our most able and talented ministers in all denominations would gladly preach Jesus only. I doubt if there is a true minister of the Christian religion to-day who does not feel the burden of his sectarian obligations. Certainly the more Christ-like—the more zealous and best-fitted to teach the truths of Jesus—would rejoice to be set free. If the Christianity of denominationalism has not produced religious leaders who would be happy to preach nothing but Jesus, and to devote all their time and strength to a spiritual ministry, then indeed is the modern church system condemned. In fact, the great

majority of the ministers themselves, so far as they dare, are saying that denominationalism is doomed.”

“But how could the temple minister be controlled?” asked Riley. “Would he not set up his own individual ideas and rally about himself a group of personal followers?”

Dan smiled. “*You forget that the five trustees are members of five different denominations. These trustees will undertake this work because they have come to realize the tragic failure of denominationalism, and because they understand that the teaching of Jesus alone can make the Christian religion effective. These men, from five different denominations, would select the minister. The Board of Trustees would be self-perpetuating, which means that as vacancies occur, the trustees will fill them with men like themselves in ideals and purpose.*

“Furthermore, the minister who undertakes this ministry will of necessity throw aside every denominational interest. No denomination will recognize him. He will be ostracized by all sectarian organizations, branded as unorthodox and shunned by his fellow ministers. It will be quite impossible for him to have any sectarian interests even should he be so inclined. He will have nothing to do with the business management of the trustees, no necessity to raise money, no need to bid for social favors, no hope of denominational preferments or honors, no incentive to raise theological questions—theological questions do not grow out of Jesus’ teaching. There will be nothing for him to argue about. The very nature of his position, his freedom and the nature of his teaching will keep him close to the Master, and single-minded in His service.”

“Will there be organization of the workers who engage in the activities of which you speak?” asked the Judge.

Dan answered: “I suppose that will work out as a necessity, but there will be no denominational guilds, or aids or societies for the purpose of making money for denominational ends. The only organization will be that which is necessary to make the ministry of the people to the poor most effective, and to prevent confusion and duplication of effort.”

“What provision will be made for the social life?” asked the groceryman.

“None, in the sense of the present denominational churches’ efforts,” Dan answered. “Because there will be, as I have said, no distinctive organization. The preaching, the worship, the activities, will all center on the one purpose of the Christian religion, which is *to build Christian character*. If the people are Christians, in deed and in truth, can we doubt that their social life will be Christian? With the principles which have been outlined once established, we may safely leave the social activities of the people to take care of themselves. There will be no need for church balls to raise money and no need for Young People’s Societies to perpetuate denominationalism.”

“I can see how the experiment endowed by you would work in Westover,” said Judge Burnes, “but the demonstration will have a comparatively small national value unless it can be extended to other parts of the country.”

Big Dan returned: “My belief is, Judge, that this Westover Foundation will merely open the way.

“I have faith that when the plan is established the most Christian members of all denominations will be drawn to the

movement. The best paying members of the denominations—I mean those who pay most in proportion to their means—are the most Christian. You will find it is these same Christian members who are also the most generous supporters of your city charities. Because these Christian men and women already recognize the waste and inefficiency of the denominations, and deplore the Church’s indifference to charity, they will be first to see the value of the temple plan. The temple worship, the preaching of Jesus only; the activities, ministering to the poor; the offerings, one hundred per cent given to the needy—all this will make a strong appeal to the most sincere, most intelligent and most Christian members of all denominations, and they will drop their denominationalism just as all sensible people cast aside their candles and whale-oil and kerosene lamps when the electric light was put within their reach.

“The denominational churches will be abandoned as the old carriages and buggies were discarded when automobiles became possible. When the strength of the present forty-four churches in Westover is concentrated upon the Christian religion, and the money which now pays the running expenses of these forty-four organizations all goes through the temple offerings to the poor, denominationalism in Westover will go out of business.

“The two and a half millions now in useless church property will then be converted in a Foundation similar to the Westover Foundation to set Christianity free in some other community.

“In addition to this, millions will be given to religion when religion is made effective. Millions will be available for Christian work when the donors know that the money will not

be used to keep alive these divisions in which the people, as a whole, no longer believe.”

Said Mayor Riley: “There is no doubt that the plan would make great inroads upon the strength of denominationalism. At the same time there are many of the older members who would never change.”

“Certainly,” returned Dan, “*but what about the younger generation?* Our young people, in their revolt against the present church system, have proved quite conclusively that they would not be bound by the sectarian prejudices of their parents.

“It is this generation which is just coming into power in the country that is most important to our national future. I am convinced that the youth of the land, in their daring independence, their intolerance of sham and in their insistence upon realities, would be irresistibly drawn to such a presentation of the Christian religion as this plan proposes.”

“These trustees,” said the groceryman doubtfully, “would need to be men above reproach.”

“No man is above reproach,” answered Big Dan. “One of the most beautiful and vital truths of Jesus’ teaching is that, while it sets up an ideal and makes that ideal possible for humanity, Christianity does not rest upon the perfection of its followers, but upon the truth of its principles. Christianity is not in attaining a perfect ideal but in the effort put forth to attain. It is not in a victory gained, it is in the strength and valor of the battle waged. Of the twelve chosen by Jesus to be His personal companions and disciples, and to whom He committed His teaching, not one was above reproach. They had all the characteristic weaknesses of human nature. There

certainly would be less chance for mistakes under this simple plan than under the competitive system now in vogue.

“There are in every denomination thousands of men qualified to serve on such a board of trustees. The many who are already filling like positions of trust prove that there is no lack of fitting material. It is the opportunity to serve that is lacking.

“And this,” added Big Dan in conclusion, “brings us again to my request that you five men undertake this work in Westover. And again I urge—before you accept, count well the cost.

“You will be subjected to the bitter attacks of your denominations. You will be called renegades—disloyal to your churches. You will be held up to scorn and ridicule. You will be charged with all sorts of motives. You will be called fanatics, fools. Business pressure will be brought to bear. You will lose friends, patrons, customers, votes. Indeed, you should count well the cost before you undertake the task.

“You should look also to the end to be gained for your homes, for your children, for your country, and for humanity.”

CHAPTER XVII

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

WHEN Jack Ellory talked to Grandpa Paddock that afternoon, about his hopes for a home with all that the word implies, he had been very much in earnest.

Men of his stamp are not generally given to talking about such things, but he was really in a state of mind over the affair in the woods and grandpa had made it easy for him to speak.

Jack's love for Georgia had come as a natural, almost unnoticed development of their childhood intimacy. He had grown into his love as he had grown into manhood. As he had passed from early childhood into adolescence and from youth to full manhood, his feeling for his little girl playmate had changed from childhood affection to the fully matured love of a man for his mate.

But with the slow and natural development of this mating love, young Ellory had been subjected to all the influences which operate to form those unwholesome conceptions of life which so sadly characterize our modern youth. With his physical development and the changing quality of his love for this girl had come a mental development—had come views, mental attitudes, habits of thought, contacts, experiences. As he gained knowledge of the ways of men and women, he acquired that cynical disbelief in womanly virtue which is the seed of racial degeneracy. Almost before he knew the *quality* of his love for Georgia, he was *afraid* to believe in her as a man must of necessity believe in his mate. The instinct of

self-protection led him to defend himself against his developing love. He felt instinctively that if Georgia was what his set commonly assumed all women to be, he must not permit himself to think of her as his wife. The same instinct operated in all his association with this girl, to protect her from that which he feared by guarding her even against himself.

Then came that incident in the woods. Because the girl had been strong enough to resist him, his doubt of her had been swept away; his love had triumphed over his fears and had become the dominant thing in his life. But with this awakening had come realization that the girl, in her love, had been subjected to the same forces which had inhibited him. The very incident, which had convinced Jack that Georgia was *not* like all the others, had brought with his awakened love for her a new fear. *He feared, now, that her doubt of him had been so confirmed that she would not dare accept him.*

Then grandpa's visit had brought relief and in answer to Georgia's call he had hurried to her in the spirit of one who loves and is loved, and who in his love has found realization of his best ideals and fulfillment of his fondest dreams.

He had been shocked by the girl's greeting, but his mood had served to carry him on to the declaration of his love. The utter recklessness and apparent lack of decent love ideals in her answer to his proposal had crashed all his awakened hopes, but his old habit of instinctively protecting her had caused him to yield to her mood and to go with her that night. And yet, even under the shock of his disappointment and his reawakened fears, he seemed to sense that the girl's desperate recklessness was a result of some experience of which she could not speak. He felt that the girl needed him—that in her

state of mind she was not safe without him. His instinct to protect the woman he loved was strong enough to cause him to act for her, even while his hopes were apparently destroyed by the nature of her refusal of his proposal.

With the news of the tragic results of that wild party came afterthoughts of Georgia's apparent surrender to the standards which prevailed among their set. Even had he known that the girl would accept him now, he would not have dared ask her again to marry him.

Did he still love her? Yes, he admitted to himself, he did. And that, he added in the vernacular of his day, "was the hell of it." Had he not loved her as he did, he could have enjoyed making the most of the opportunities offered by her abandonment of those standards which had, so far, protected them. But Jack Ellory's love for Georgia was not the kind of love which would permit him to accept her reckless offer of herself. He wanted her for a wife, not a mistress. Because he might have her for a mistress made it impossible for him to ask her to be his wife. Because he loved her as his wife made it as impossible for him to take her as his mistress.

And yet, while sober thought compelled him to accept her refusal as final, he still could not accept the situation. He felt baffled. He sensed something behind the apparent facts. The conviction that she loved him persisted. He felt that there was a reason for her refusal which he must know, and that he could not surrender all hope until he had seen her again. He must know why she had so changed from the girl who had withstood him, that afternoon in the woods, to the girl who had offered herself to him, the night of that wild party.

He sent a little note to her asking if she would see him.

The answer came—a pitiful, broken-hearted letter, but so final that he was compelled to accept it as the end.

Mrs. Paddock had lied to her husband that morning when she told him that their daughter was sleeping. She had talked with the girl in her room—had begged her to keep silent about the Astell affair, and Georgia had promised to say nothing more about it because she was indifferent now to anything that might happen. All her love hopes, which grandma had built up for her, were gone. She realized that in refusing Jack, as she had, she had destroyed his belief in her, without which their happiness was impossible. Nothing now mattered. While the groceryman and his wife were miserably pretending over their breakfast, their daughter was lying in her bed, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling—trying not to think—trying not to feel.

But when the girl's father came to her later and she saw that he knew about Astell, her love for him stirred her sympathies. The tragedy of her own love drove her very close to him in the tragedy of his love. And then, when she understood that to protect her, to save her mother, and their home, her father would endure his shame in silence and pretend not to know, she realized that she must help him. For her mother she would do nothing. She cared as little for what might happen to her mother as she cared for what might happen to herself. Why, she asked herself, *should* she care? But for her father—her pal, her dear old groceryman daddy!—she would play the game. They had not played together lately as they used to do. It would be her part to reestablish their old comradeship. He needed her even as she needed him.

During the days which followed, when the community interest in Harry Winton's death and funeral was at its height, the girl did not leave the house. She refused to see any one except her parents. Had it not been for her father's dependence upon her, the situation would have been intolerable. In this crisis, through which the groceryman and his daughter were passing, it was their loving companionship which saved them both.

Then the groceryman went to Kansas City, and left his daughter alone with her mother. The girl did not know why he had gone. With only the companionship of her mother, the days dragged miserably. Mrs. Paddock scarcely spoke to her, and was absent from the house most of the time—Georgia did not know where. The girl's attitude toward her mother bordered on a contemptuous indifference.

Then, one morning, a telegram came. The groceryman would return home the following day.

Mrs. Paddock, without comment, handed the message to her daughter.

The girl read it silently.

After waiting in vain for Georgia to speak, the mother asked uneasily: "Have you any idea why your father went to Kansas City?"

The girl shook her head. "No."

Mrs. Paddock, watching her daughter closely, said: "It is strange that Henry Winton, Ed Jones, Judge Burnes and Mayor Riley should all go with him—and that their wives know no more about it than I."

The girl made no reply.

“Your father used to talk with me about his affairs,” complained the older woman.

Georgia did not speak.

“He evidently thinks I am not to be trusted,” added Mrs. Paddock, bitterly.

The daughter was silent.

“For heaven’s sake, say something,” cried the mother; “you sit there like a graven image!”

“I am sorry,” returned Georgia calmly, “but there doesn’t seem to be anything for me to say. You surely can’t expect me to sympathize with you because father does not trust you?”

At this, Mrs. Paddock was silent for some time and the girl could see that she was debating some question in her own mind. Then hesitatingly, as if reaching a doubtful conclusion, she said: “Mary Winton asked me to spend the day with her. She is lonely and wants me to drive out to their old home. I shall be away until dinner time this evening. Why don’t you run out to the farm for the day? It will be good for you. You can’t spend the rest of your life shut up here in this house.”

The girl felt a sudden longing to see her grandparents. She saw that for some reason her mother wanted her to go. She hesitated a brief moment, then answered with sudden decision that she would spend the day in the country.

A half hour later Georgia bade her mother a perfunctory good-by and went to the garage for the car. She looked at the indicator on the gasoline tank, consulted the oil gauge, saw that there was water in the radiator and was about to step into the car when she remembered an article in the last issue of

the *Literary Digest* which she had thought grandpa would enjoy.

Returning to the house and entering through the kitchen, she was just in time to hear her mother's voice at the telephone.

"No, he is still in Kansas City. I have a telegram that he will return home to-morrow....

"Of course not—she has gone to spend the day at the farm....

"No, no, you can't come this forenoon....

"No, I must go down town—I am sorry, but I *must*....

"Oh, Edward, you know better....

"Yes—yes—this afternoon...."

Georgia went back through the kitchen, and out to the garage.

What should she do? It was evident that her mother had deliberately planned for this meeting with Astell. The girl did not believe that they had seen each other since that terrible night of Harry Winton's death. She had hoped that in spite of her promise not to tell her father about Astell, her mother's fear of exposure would force her to drop the affair. If her mother continued to see Astell—if she even saw him once more—the situation might easily develop beyond the point where it would be possible to avert irretrievable disaster. For her father's sake, if not for her mother's, she must do something.

Mechanically she stepped into the car and started the motor.

As the girl turned into the street from the driveway and passed the house, Mrs. Paddock appeared on the porch.

Halfway down the block the girl glanced back and saw her mother leaving the house.

Still with no definite plan, but feeling that she must do something, Georgia drove around a few blocks and returned to the garage.

Reëntering the house, she moved nervously about the living room, then with a sudden desperate resolution, she went to the phone and called Astell's number.

When the answer came she said hurriedly, in a voice which might easily be mistaken for her mother's carefully cultured tones: "I have changed my mind, Edward—I'm not going out this morning after all...."

"Yes—yes—oh, wonderful...."

"Come at ten...."

"Yes—yes—and leave your car somewhere a block or two away."

In her room upstairs, the girl watched from a window which gave a view of the street in front of the house.

Would her mother or Astell arrive first? What if they should approach the house at the same moment?

It was half past nine when Mrs. Paddock returned to her home.

The girl, listening at her door which she had set ajar, heard her mother come up the stairs and go to her room.

Fifteen minutes later she saw Astell coming up the street.

Quietly, she stole from her room and down the stairs. Careful to make no sound, she opened the front door.

Georgia was right in thinking that her mother had not seen Astell since that meeting which she had witnessed. The truth is that Mrs. Paddock had not arranged *this* interview from any real desire to be with the man. She was not capable of a passion strong enough to drive her to such risk.

The groceryman's wife had been terribly frightened by her daughter's arraignment and was still afraid. She bitterly resented her daughter's discovery of her conduct. As she saw the old companionship between her husband and her daughter being reestablished and, with some reason, perhaps, felt herself left out and, to a degree, ignored, the situation for her, too, became almost unbearable. She had been driven to attempt this interview with Astell by her feeling that things could not continue as they were—that the crash might come at any moment.

But most of all, perhaps, the groceryman's wife felt that the change in her husband's attitude toward her was ominous. In spite of his resolution to act as if nothing had happened until, for Georgia's sake, he could be sure of doing the right thing to save their home, Joe Paddock could not play the game beyond a certain point. Mrs. Paddock was puzzled and anxious. If her husband knew, why did he remain silent? If he did not know, what had changed him? She had always thought that she dominated her commonplace, groceryman husband by virtue of her intellectual superiority. Like many women of her type, she was incapable of understanding that she ruled her mate, not by right of *her* superiority, but by the grace of *his* love. Suddenly, with no apparent reason, she had lost her power over him. She, all at once, discovered in this man, who had always been so pliant to her will, a rocklike quality against which she felt herself helpless.

It should be said, too, that Georgia's mother bitterly regretted her affair with Astell. After all, her husband and her daughter were more to her than this man. But she lacked that strength of character which might have enabled her to extricate herself from the situation into which she had drifted. If the crash should come, as it might any day, she would be left helpless. Her husband and daughter would have each other. Who would take care of her?

By this it will be understood that Mrs. Paddock was born with a not unusual feminine complex which led her to assume that, though the heavens fall, some one must take care of her. She felt that she had paid all her obligations to life by being born a female. She fulfilled her mission on earth by permitting some man to provide for her. She loved her groceryman husband, yes, but she expressed that love by accepting all that his love prompted him to do for her as her right. The more she loved him the more he was obligated to do for her. She instinctively sought to absorb him. Because she loved him he was her personal property—he had, in her mind, no existence except as he existed for her. She recognized that as husband and wife, in theory, they were one but she never failed to remember that, in fact, she was *the* one. Her love sought fulfillment not in what she could be to him, but in what he could do for her. This arrangement had worked because, while the only expression of love which she knew was to *take*, it was the groceryman's nature to express his love by *giving*.

And now something had happened—her commonplace, groceryman husband was no longer her personal property. She did not ask herself if she had lost his love; she was too much alarmed that she had lost *him*. He had for so many

years yielded himself to her that she was frightened to find that he could so calmly and quietly become his own master. To establish dominion over some man became an immediate necessity, to be left without a man to provide for her was a fate too horrible to contemplate. She much preferred to keep her husband and daughter and home, but if the situation developed to make that impossible, then she must be assured of some other man's support. Astell, of course, was the logical candidate.

Mrs. Paddock heard the front door close. Surprised, wondering, she stepped into the upper hall and listened.

It—she could not be mistaken—it was Georgia's voice. The girl seemed to be entertaining some one. Why was she at home? She had gone to the country for the day! And Astell was coming! He must not come—he must be warned—he—good heaven! That other voice—a man's voice! It was Astell! Astell was there with Georgia! And Georgia believed that her mother was with Mary Winton—and Astell thought that Mrs. Paddock was down town—and they were there together! Her daughter and Edward Astell!

The groceryman's wife forced herself to listen. She could not distinguish their words, for the two had gone into the living room, but the tone of her daughter's voice was unmistakably teasing—and she laughed. The man's voice was as clearly pleading. Then their voices sank to low confidential murmurs.

The woman, in the hall above, was almost beside herself with anger, humiliation and fear. She pictured the scene which, she believed, was being enacted in the living room. One moment she wanted to shriek—to rush in upon them—

denounce them—upbraid them—to strike—to hurt them physically. The next moment she wanted to crawl away somewhere, anywhere, and hide her shame. If only she could disappear and never be seen again by any one who knew her.

When Astell was gone, the groceryman's daughter came slowly up the stairs and found her mother waiting for her. For what seemed a long time they stood looking at each other in a dead silence. The mother's face was white with anger. The girl's face was pale, but serene.

The older woman spoke first: "I thought you were at the farm?"

"And I thought you were spending the day with Mrs. Winton," the girl returned calmly.

"Will you explain the meaning of this?" demanded Mrs. Paddock. "How dare you receive that man here, in this house, when you believe yourself alone?"

"I have a better right to Edward than you have," the girl retorted. "You seem to forget that I was present when you thought *you* were alone with him. You told me you were not going to be here to-day. I drove away to make you think that I was going to the country. Then I came back and phoned him. Surely you don't think that you are the only woman in the world for him. Edward and I have often met at Tony's and the Inn and other joints."

Mrs. Paddock gasped. "Do you mean—is it possible—" she faltered, "that you phoned and asked him to come to you—this morning?"

"It was easy," returned the girl, impudently. "When he knew you were away he came running. He would have spent

the day with me if he had not had important business this afternoon. And why should I not invite him—why should he not come? We are both free souls, you know. Am I so ugly and ill-formed and unattractive that you wonder a man of Edward’s taste would want me?”

Laura Louise Paddock was crushed. Her punishment was almost too cruel. Her face was haggard and old. Her eyes were pleading—filled with shame. Her form relaxed and drooped.

The daughter’s eyes filled with tears, but the mother did not see.

As the older woman bowed her head and turned away she said, with a faltering whimper: “I could not have believed it—I shall never, never see that man again.”

“Just a minute,” cried the girl.

Mrs. Paddock halted on the threshold of her room.

“You are right that you will never see Edward Astell again,” Georgia said and paused, as if to give full emphasis to her words. Then she continued deliberately: “Astell is leaving Westover this afternoon. It will be a long, long time before he dares return. I warned him that when father came home tomorrow I was going to tell him about you two, and that daddy would certainly kill him as any decent man would kill such a dirty rat.”

Again she paused, then: “Of course, with Astell gone, I shall not tell father, and you will go on as if nothing had happened.”

The girl’s voice faltered, and the tears came: “Oh, Mother, Mother, for daddy’s sake, let’s help him to save us and our home.”

Mrs. Paddock, without a word, without a look toward her daughter, closed the door of her room.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUILDING THE TEMPLE

THE groceryman arrived home from Kansas City on the morning train. That afternoon he went to the farm.

When grandpa and grandma had heard from their son the reason for his visit to Kansas City, with the details of the proposed Westover Church Foundation and the temple plan, grandma looked at grandpa with a knowing smile. The old gentleman smiled back at her and moved his chair closer to her side, and the groceryman was surprised and relieved to see that his parents were not nearly so shocked at his new religious views as he had feared they would be.

“Son,” said grandpa slowly, “your mother and I love this farm. It has been our life. It seems like, sometimes, that every square foot of it is associated with some precious memory.

“When we first settled here in the wilderness, I cleared the land and plowed the ground for our first crops, with oxen. We thought a lot of those oxen.” He looked at grandma.

“ ’Member old Buck and Red and Baldy and Jerry, Mother?”

Grandma chuckled and wiped her eyes.

Grandpa continued: “But when the land was all cleared and the stumps gone and we could work horses to better advantage, we gave up using oxen. ’Cause why? ’Cause it was the *farming* that counted most.

“And then we got to be mighty fond of our horses — ’Member Tom and Nelly and Dick and Sally, Mother?”

Grandma nodded and smiled, with misty eyes.

“Why, we *raised* those horses, son,” continued the old gentleman. “They were almost like our children. Even *you* can remember Prince and Joe, our carriage team, and old Kate, that your mother used to drive. I never *could* learn to love a piece of machinery like I love a horse, nohow. But, just the same, we’re doing most of our farming with tractors now, ’cause farming, you see, is the *main* thing.

“I suspect, if mother and I keep staying on a few years more, we’ll be farming with flying machines, or maybe I’ll just sit up here on the porch and push a ’lectric button and the plows and harrows and cultivators and mowing machines and reapers will run themselves, without me ever gettin’ out of my chair. I’m dead sure of one thing—if I’m here and can *farm* better by changing from tractors to something else, *I’ll change* just like I always have, ’cause it’s the *farming* that’s always been most important.

“There’s another thing—with all the changes we’ve made in our ways of farming, I notice that we’re plowing and planting the same old ground, and that it’s the same old sun and rain that makes the seed grow and the harvest ripen in the same old way.

“Well, your mother and I love the old Presbyterian Church that we helped to start in Westover. We’ve seen some wonderful crops of Christian character planted and cultivated and harvested by that old church. But our love for the church we helped to build has never blinded us to the truth that it was the Christianity of Jesus that counted most. For a good many years, when this country was *new*, our church was all there was to work with, and that was all right. But anybody can see that this denominationalism of to-day is just as

inadequate in religion as our old oxen would be, now, in farming.

“As I see it, this plan that you’ve been telling us about can’t in any way change Christianity, any more than our using a tractor instead of oxen or horses changes the ground or the sun and rain. It’s the same old Christianity that you’re proposing to teach, only you’re going to teach it with modern efficiency, just as we’re working the same old farm with modern machinery.

“If this new plan can teach Christianity better than our old denominational methods—and I believe it can—why then if we’re *really Christians we’re bound to use it.*”

The old gentleman reached out to pat grandma’s hand reassuringly. “That’s the way we feel about it, isn’t it, Mother?”

“That’s the only way we *could* think about it without putting our Presbyterianism above our Lord and Master,” returned the old lady bravely. “And your father and I have *never* done *that*, Joe. But there’s some of us old ones will cry over it a little, I suspect.

“I remember that when we first moved into this house from the little log cabin that we’d built with our own hands, and that we started housekeeping in the year we were married, I used to go back down the hill to the old cabin every day and cry a little ’cause I was so lonesome and strange in this big new place. But shucks, I wouldn’t near have gone back down there to *live*. And even *now*, when there’s nothing left of the old log cabin, I *love the spot where it stood*.

“We didn’t build this big house ’cause we weren’t *happy* in our log cabin. If it had been just for your father and me we’d *never* have moved. But we needed this house ’cause you see

we was countin' on having a big family. We *had* to have this house to raise the children right. The cabin wasn't going to be big enough.

“If it could be done, I'd like to see all God's children gathered together under one roof. You can't raise a real family by scatterin' 'em around in so many different homes. If Christianity hasn't outgrown its little old denominational log cabins, it ought to. Those cabins—taking them any way you please—are too small for the religious family that the Church has got to raise, if it expects to cut much of a figure in the world to-day. It's time the Church was moving into a bigger house, I say. There's a lot of us will cry over the move, I suspect, *but we'll move just the same, 'cause we love the family more than we do the house, after all.*”

The papers announced the Westover Church Foundation in rather a light vein, as if it did not matter much what a millionaire did with his money provided he spent it. The bare facts were given, with no remarks except the suggestion that the chief value of the project would be more or less publicity for Westover. The names of the five trustees were given without comment.

Mrs. Paddock read the announcement and demanded an explanation.

Georgia was interested.

The groceryman told them about the plan.

Georgia asked many questions.

Mrs. Paddock waxed more and more indignant. She protested against *her* husband having anything to do with such a ridiculous affair. She feared for her standing in the

community. It would be vulgar for them to countenance such a religious fad. The *best* people were always conservative. “Think how your father and mother will feel, with the church that they founded depending upon your support! If you have so much influence with Dan Matthews why did you not interest him in your *own* church? I’m sure we could use the money. Everybody will be disgusted with you. As if your grocery business were not humiliation enough—now *this!*”

But the groceryman’s daughter, glimpsing the deeper truths of the plan, supported her father with eager loyalty.

The church people received the announcement with great interest. The ministers were mildly alarmed. Five different pastors interviewed the five trustees.

The general public, as a whole, was amused.

The friends of the trustees advised, joked and asked questions. When the groceryman and his associates explained the purpose of the experiment, the questioners became thoughtful. One group of the younger business men, headed by Jack Ellory, was bitterly opposed to the movement. The city, they said, was already dunned to death by the churches and could not stand another. Several of those who were most opposed went privately to the trustees in hopes of selling them a lot. But Saxton already held an option on the most desirable property. The disappointed ones became more outspoken in their opinions that this new-fangled religious scheme would be a bad thing for Westover.

It had been decided, by Dan Matthews and the trustees, that Mr. Saxton would remain in Westover and have active charge of the work until the plan was fully established and the first move of the Westover Church Foundation was to open an office in the business district.

The day that the office furniture was being moved in Mr. Saxton received an applicant for a position.

“I have had no experience,” the applicant admitted frankly, “but I am sure I could learn to be useful, and I want very much to try.”

Mr. Saxton smiled at her earnestness. “Have you talked with your father about it, Miss Paddock?”

“No, sir, but I don’t think daddy would object. Do you?”

Saxton replied gravely: “No, child, I don’t think he would object.” Then he added: “The trustees permit me to employ my own assistants, of course. I am quite sure you could, as you say, learn to be useful. As to salary....”

She interrupted him eagerly: “Oh, Mr. Saxton! But I would not expect a salary! Don’t you understand? Father has told me all about the plan. I believe in it. It is wonderful! It is Christianity—*real* Christianity, I mean! And I want to help. Please let me come! I *so* want to do something!”

“You are hired,” cried Saxton promptly.

“But, about that salary,” he said when her rejoicing had calmed so that he could speak. “This Foundation, you understand, is a *business* organization. The trustees, Georgia (I really must call you Georgia now that I am your boss), the trustees have decided on the policy of paying regular salaries to their regular office force. You expect to consider this a regular job, do you not?”

“Yes, sir—just as though I were working in a bank.”

“Well, then, you must accept a salary. If you wish to turn your salary in at the temple services as your offering, that is your own private affair.”

Mrs. Paddock was completely overcome when she learned that her daughter—*her* daughter—was to work in an office like a common stenographer. Georgia's old crowd heard the news with amazement, laughter and mourning. A few were thoughtful. The groceryman's happiness over the girl's resolution may be imagined.

With the passing months, the work of building the temple progressed steadily. There were no blurbs in the papers. There was no drive for funds. If Dan Matthews ever came to town it was not known. The newspapers, after that first announcement, never mentioned his name. Indeed, the general public soon ceased to connect Big Dan with the Foundation, for the trustees, understanding that the effectiveness of the plan demanded that no man's name be glorified by this temple, were careful never to refer to him when speaking of the work.

As the building went forward in an orderly and efficient manner, the people were not long in discovering that there was nothing in Westover to compare with the temple in architectural beauty. Interest in the movement grew. The public looked upon the Foundation with increasing respect. While the plan of the experiment was not yet generally understood, Westover was beginning to feel that something of more than ordinary religious significance was taking place.

With this change in the attitude of the people toward the experiment, the apprehension of the churches increased. The denominational "higher-ups" gave the matter their attention and advised the local ministers. The preachers, with more or less wit, began to ridicule this latest freak religion. The sinful waste of money was deplored. Efforts to strengthen

denominational pride became more strenuous; exhortations to loyalty to the faith of the fathers more fervid. Sermons, to demonstrate the fallacy of thinking that Christianity could possibly endure without denominations, were frequent. The pastors labored with their errant members and with those influential ones whom they had reason to fear might be tempted to become errant.

The trustees, in answer to all this, said nothing. To the attacks of the ministers they made no reply nor did they in any way retaliate. When questioned directly by some interested one, they simply explained the plan.

The inevitable followed. The very people whom the ministers tried to turn against the movement, were aroused by the criticisms of the clergy to a still greater interest in the Foundation and its plan. Because human nature is what it is, the increasing opposition of the churches served to turn the tide of sentiment toward the temple.

As popular opposition to the temple became less active Mrs. Paddock became more lenient. She was not slow in interpreting the signs that her groceryman husband's connection with the Foundation might turn out a distinction instead of a dishonor. There were indications, in certain circles, which led her to comment with more caution. So far as it was possible, she held to her old place of superiority in her home. The Astell affair was a closed incident. But the feeling between mother and daughter persisted.

Georgia was absorbed in her work under Mr. Saxton in the Foundation office. She attended no more parties at Tony's and Sundown Inn. She saw Jack occasionally, by chance, but when possible they avoided each other.

The groceryman, grimly determined to follow the way he had chosen, quietly declined to come again under the rule of Mrs. Paddock. With his daughter's interest in the Foundation work, and their old companionship restored, he was happier than he had been for several years. As for the rest—with Astell out of the way, he was content to wait developments.

CHAPTER XIX

WORSHIP

THE temple was placed well back from the street, in grounds spacious enough to set it apart from all neighboring buildings. This, in itself, gave the edifice a distinction, a dignity and a value which was sadly lacking in most of the denominational churches in Westover.

Wedged in as they usually are, on lots scarcely large enough to hold them, with other buildings crowding close to their walls, and nothing but the sidewalks to separate them from the gutters of the streets, our modern houses of worship do not signify that the religion, which they visibly represent, occupies a place of much importance in the lives of the people who build them. In the pinching economy of space, and in the cheap, materialistic or trivial and showy spirit of the architecture, one feels the denominationalism which grudges room for its neighbors, builds on selfishness, and seeks to attract rather than deeply to impress.

The temple grounds were ample for effective planting which would add to the simple dignity of the building that quiet beauty which is the handmaiden of all true religion.

If it be said that Christianity needs no distinctive edifice with beautiful surroundings—that, perhaps, is true. Certainly, Jesus needed no pulpit other than a mountainside, a fishing boat, a lowly home, or a seat beside the road. But if Jesus *were* to build a place of worship in Westover, can any one doubt that he would give to it that importance among the common buildings of the city which he would have his

religion occupy in the thoughts of the people? Why should our public libraries and state universities be made so imposing and beautiful, and our places of worship so commonplace and ugly? Why should the animal houses in our zoölogical parks be set amid gracious trees and shrubs and generous lawns and lovely flowers, and our houses of God built so close to the gutters of our streets and the back yards of our dwellings?

For the architecture of the temple, it is enough to say that it was Christian. There was a tower for the bells and, high above all, softly lighted by subdued rays from some hidden source, quietly glowing against the dark night sky, a cross.

During the week before the opening service in the temple, every citizen of Westover received, through the mail, a pamphlet setting forth the plan of the Westover Church Foundation—much as Dan Matthews had presented it to the groceryman and his friends. The reason for the experiment was given with no unkindly criticism of the churches and with genuine appreciation of the good accomplished by the denominations in the past. But facts and figures were presented frankly. The endowment, in relation to the present expenditures of the forty-four Westover churches, was explained. The offering to the poor, the activities, and the character of the teaching were stressed. The name of the temple minister was given, with the hours when he would be at the temple to receive those who might wish to counsel with him. The name of Dan Matthews did not appear in the pamphlet, nor was any reference made to the man who had established the Foundation.

The newspapers took their stories from the pamphlet. There was no long and elaborate program of special music

and exceptional singers. There were no flamboyant promises of eloquent preaching. There was no extravagant write-up of the minister. There was no advertising of a sensational sermon subject. The announcement of the hours of the service and the place was as simple and sincere as the invitation given by Jesus: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Sunday came, and with the beginning of the day the temple bells were heard—clearly, sweetly, in the quiet of the early morning, the beautiful music of the chimes floated over the city—“Nearer, My God, to Thee.” In hundreds of homes the people listened, and many hearts, which commonly held no thought of the day, involuntarily echoed the familiar words of that prayer as it was sung by the sweet-toned bells.

When the hour for worship arrived, the bells summoned the people. From every quarter of the city they came: the curious, the seekers after the new and unusual, the lovers of the sensational, those who hungered for religion, those who hoped for something to criticize or ridicule, and those who had grasped the meaning of the plan and were praying for its success.

The groceryman’s emotion was too deep for words. If there had been in his heart a faint, lingering question as to the outcome of this religious experiment, it had vanished with that morning prayer of the bells.

Georgia, close by her father’s side, shared his emotion as they now shared most of their thoughts and interests.

Mrs. Paddock, who had decided to attend this first service because she was told that many of the best people would be there, was very quiet and walked beside her husband with not

quite her usual air of ownership. She, too, had heard the early morning bells.

As the three arrived at the broad walk which led from the street to the temple doors, the groceryman felt his daughter's arm tremble, and drew her closer with a comforting little movement. Jack Ellory was only a few paces ahead.

Then, just as they were about to turn from the street toward the temple entrance, an automobile drew up to the curb and they saw Grandpa and Grandma Paddock, Davie Bates and his father and mother.

The groceryman and his daughter greeted them joyously. Mrs. Paddock was more reserved. She was annoyed that the Jamisons should have happened along at the very moment when the groceryman was shaking hands with the delivery boy and his parents. Davie's face was beaming with happiness. His mother's eyes were shining with gratitude and thanksgiving. The carpenter's deep voice trembled a little as he told them that he was going back to work Monday morning! In spite of Mrs. Paddock's annoyance, they waited until Davie had parked the car and then all went up the walk and into the temple together.

As the throng of people streamed toward the place of worship there was much talk and laughter. Neighbors, friends and acquaintances greeted one another with comment and joke. But as they drew near the entrance and heard the music of an organ, soft and low, the laughter died away—voices were hushed.

There are few natures that do not respond instantly to an atmosphere of sincere and true religion. It would have been a strange person who could have entered through the portals of that temple of Christianity without being instantly impressed

by the spirit of the place. The great room, softly lighted, was beautiful in the simple dignity of its proportions and quiet coloring. There was no attempt at elaborate decoration; no display of costly carvings and expensive windows; no glittering chandeliers. But while this place of worship was without a suggestion of theatrical showiness, on the one hand, it was as far from cheapness and bad taste, on the other.

Except for a simple reading desk there was no “pulpit furniture.” There was no organ in sight. There was no choir, no chorus, no singer, to be seen. On either side of the rostrum and from the main floor, there were arched openings of passageways, leading evidently to other rooms. There were no doors except the great doors at the entrance. The seats were as comfortable as the seats in the best motion-picture theaters.

On the back of each chair was a receptacle to receive the offering of the person occupying the seat next in the rear. There was an inscription on this receptacle: “Your offering made in the name of Jesus for the relief of those of whom He said ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’ ”

There was also a small rack with a supply of cards and a pencil. On each card was printed: “If you wish to make an offering of personal service, write your name and address in the space below.” On the same card was another line: “If you know of any person in need, write the name and address in the space below and deposit this card with your offering.”

There were no racks filled with assorted hymn books and church literature.

With the subdued tones of the unseen organ trembling on the air, and with nothing to distract their attention, the people

became very quiet. Many heads were bowed in prayer.

The minister entered from the archway on the right of the pulpit, and going to the reading desk stood before the people. He was dressed in no distinctive robe or garb.

With no organist in sight, mysteriously working his stops and keys; with no elaborately gowned and hatted soprano; no choir fussing with their music; no distinguished tenor; no cornet soloist tinkering with his instrument; the attention of the audience was fixed upon the teacher.

The music of the organ died softly away. There was a moment of silence. The minister raised his hands and the great audience arose to stand, with bowed heads, for the invocation prayer.

Again the organ was heard, and as the melody of one of those grand old hymns which are common to all denominations, and which for generations have been woven into the religious life of the nation, was recognized, the words of the hymn appeared in letters of light in a panel above the pulpit. There was no announcement of the hymn or number. There was no noise and confusion of books being taken from the racks; no searching for number or page; no helping a neighbor find the place. The people, as they stood, merely lifted up their eyes and sang.

When the hymn was ended and the congregation seated, the minister, without preliminary remark or announcement, read a brief saying of Jesus.

Another of the Master's sayings appeared in letters of light on the panel, and the people, with uplifted faces, read in unison.

The minister read another of those truths which Jesus gave to men, and the congregation responded with another as it appeared on the panel.

“I am the way, the truth and the life,” read the minister.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches,” came the response.

“If ye love me, keep my commandments,” read the minister.

“This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you,” came the answer.

At the close of the reading the organ sounded with another hymn, and as the words appeared on the panel the multitude caught up the song in a great swelling chorus.

The minister, in a few simple words, spoke of the offering as an act of worship, and led the people to see their gifts in the light of Jesus’ teaching. He made no appeal for funds. He called attention to no deficit in the treasury. He mentioned no overdue bills or back salaries. This was followed by a prayer, made in the spirit of surrender to God and of giving to his service.

With the closing words of the prayer the organ tones, soft and low, again filled the room. The people sat or knelt with bowed heads. They were very still. The worshipers saw in their offerings that which represented their human strength, talents, possessions. They knew that every penny they gave would be used in the relief of those in their own community who were sick or hungry or naked or homeless or wretched. There were neither ushers nor deacons passing boxes, plates or baskets, to break the feeling of the moment. There was no soloist to demand attention with an elaborate vocal effort. In the solemn hush, with only the low murmuring music of the organ, in the spirit of prayer and meditation the people laid

their gifts before their God. In true homage and adoration to the Father of all they offered that which represented themselves, for the relief of those with whom Jesus identified Himself.

Presently, without a break in the music—with no announcement or fumbling for books—the tones of the organ swung into another hymn. The minister raised his hand and again the people stood, and with upturned faces sang.

With no announcement of any kind; no calling attention to special services; no urging of attendance at Ladies' Aid meeting; no stressing of social events; no urging that the people support this or that political or civic cause; the opening words of the sermon followed.

Intellectually, the thought of the sermon commanded the attention of the best minds in the audience. In simplicity, it was like the sermons of the Master whose teaching it presented. The feeling was deeply religious; as tender as it was strong, as sincere as it was uncompromising. There was no effort to amuse or to entertain. There was no straining for pulpit oratory. With the unassuming directness and authority of the Sermon on the Mount, it was an interpretation of the spirit of Jesus in the terms of to-day—a translation of the world-old truths which Jesus taught into the language of modern life.

If there were those who expected the minister to answer the attacks of the clergy or to criticize the Church, they were disappointed. Those who came to criticize found something which awakened them to the realities of religion. Those who came from curiosity or for sensationalism were shamed. Those who came to laugh, found nothing to ridicule. Those

who came merely to hear the new preacher forgot the minister in the message from Jesus which came through him.

There was not a feature of that service which would not have been endorsed by *all* churches. There was not a word of the sermon which would not have been endorsed by *all* ministers. It was simply Christianity in spirit and in fact—and it was nothing else.

Grandpa and Grandma Paddock sat hand in hand. Grandma's lips moved often, as if in prayer. Now and then grandpa raised a hand to his gentle old eyes.

The delivery boy sat on the edge of his chair in rapt attention. His mother's face was glorified. The carpenter's strong countenance, lined with suffering, was lighted with new courage and hope.

The groceryman's daughter knew that here was strength and that safe refuge, which in her heart she had always felt must be, if only one knew where to look for it.

Mrs. Paddock was awed by the spirit of eternal truth, beside which her shifting intellectual ideals were as nothing.

The groceryman and his four friends knew that they had made no mistake.

With the closing words of the sermon, the minister raised his hands and the people stood during the short prayer and benediction which followed.

Once more the sweetly solemn tones of the organ filled the building which was sacred to the God of all Christians.

The minister left the rostrum through the arched way.

Slowly the people filed from the temple.

There was no effusive and perfunctory hand-shaking by an appointed committee at the door. There was no laughing, chattering, or exchange of gossip. Quietly, under the spell of the truths of Jesus' teaching and the spiritual atmosphere of the place, the people went out from the house of worship.

CHAPTER XX

HAPPINESS

THE denominational ministers of Westover planned a united campaign. They joined forces in a great union revival, with a revivalist of national reputation as a fighter. They held union prayer meetings. They appointed committees of workers to labor with the brethren who were going astray. In short, the churches united in opposition to the temple plan as they had never united in Christianity. It seemed almost as if they hated the sight of that cross against the sky. It was as if the music of the temple bells aroused in them only anger. Through the newspapers, the ministers made it known that their association would not recognize the temple preacher as a minister of the gospel.

To all of this the temple minister answered not a word. Never, in his sermons, was there the slightest allusion to the churches. The trustees of the Foundation quietly refused to even discuss the action of the clergymen. But the membership of the churches and the people, generally, were aroused by the bitterness of the preachers and began to ask: "To what do the churches object? If this worship in the temple is not Christian, what is Christianity? Are these ministers opposed to the teaching of Jesus? Do they object to the people meeting for worship in one house instead of forty-four? Do they object to the offerings being used to relieve the suffering of the poor in Westover?"

To those who expressed a wish to join the temple, the minister said simply: "If you wish to become a follower of

Jesus, follow Him. To accept the teaching and example of Jesus as the guiding principle of one's life, is to be a Christian. If you are a *Christian* you certainly must *by virtue of your Christianity* be a member of the Church. What more do you want? No one can join the temple, because there is nothing to join. The temple is a place where the people may, if they desire, worship God as He is revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus, and it is nothing else. Is there any organization, with laws and salaried secretaries and learned counsels, which one must join in order to observe Christmas? Love needs no organization.”

As the people came more and more to understand the principles of the temple plan, the spirit of the movement gained irresistible force. Saxton reported to Dan Matthews that the temple was filled at every service. The offerings were increasing steadily. Many were giving themselves to the work among the poor. The doors of the temple were never closed, and at almost every hour of the day people might have been seen in this house of God, sitting quietly in meditation, or kneeling in prayer. Every morning and every evening the music of the chimes floated over the city. Every night, high against the sky, the people saw the cross.

Lacking the denominational prejudices of their parents, the young people of Westover were quick to sense the reality of this worship, the spirit of the service, the authority of the preaching, and they responded with an eagerness which was amazing to the churches which had failed to interest them. Boys and girls from the high school and young men and women from the University came in increasing numbers to talk with the temple minister of religion and life, and to lay their problems before him.

As the weeks passed, the leaders of the Ladies' Aid Societies and similar denominational organizations complained to their pastors that their *best* workers were no longer attending their meetings. The treasurers of the various churches reported that the collections were decreasing at an alarming rate, and that many of their largest contributors were not renewing their subscriptions. Then the groceryman and his friends were expelled from their respective churches.

Mrs. Paddock went with her husband and daughter to every service at the temple. Gradually, in ways unmistakable, this apostle of what she had called "the higher culture" revealed an awakening interest in the Christian religion. As the teachings of Jesus and the spirit of the temple worship impressed her with the *realities* of Christianity, she sought with increasing earnestness to reestablish the home spirit of her early married years.

The groceryman, watching the change, waited the *fulfillment* of that which it promised. His old restless foreboding of evil was gone.

There was a new delivery boy at the store now—a man. Davie was in high school, with the promise of the groceryman's help when he should be ready for the University.

Georgia continued her work with Mr. Saxton in the office of the Foundation. She often went to the club in the afternoon for an hour of tennis, but she never played with Jack—though she knew that he sometimes watched her from a distance. Often, on Saturday, she would go to the farm to spend the night with grandma and grandpa, returning to town with them in time for the Sunday morning services.

But between the girl and her mother there was a wall which seemingly could not be broken down. They both wished to overcome the barrier but neither could bring herself to make the advance.

Then one day at dinner, the groceryman told his wife and daughter a bit of business news: Tony's Place was closed. "He has been falling behind for some time," Joe explained. "He blames what he calls 'this new religious craze.'" The groceryman smiled. "He tried to borrow from the First National to tide him over but we were forced to refuse the loan on the ground that this was not a temporary revival in which the people would soon lose interest, but a very definite awakening which would continue to make his business unprofitable. The other banks turned him down on the same grounds—so Tony has gone out of business."

"Poor old Tony," murmured Georgia.

Mrs. Paddock started to speak, but changed her mind and remained silent.

"I hear the Sundown Inn people are having hard work meeting their bills, too," said the groceryman. "This is confidential, of course, but the merchants are going to refuse to extend their credit after the first of the month."

They were silent for several moments, then the girl said: "By the way, Daddy, at the office to-day we figured, if the temple offerings continue at the present rate they will actually exceed the annual Organized Charity expenditures."

"Fine," cried the groceryman. Then he added confidently: "The offerings will continue, all right—and increase."

Mrs. Paddock's face was eloquent but she did not speak.

Georgia continued: "And Mr. Saxton thinks that we should start work on the other temples at once. He is going to recommend it to the trustees at their meeting to-morrow night."

"So he told me," returned the groceryman. "He is right, of course."

Mrs. Paddock rose suddenly. "Will you excuse me, please," she faltered. "I—it—it is all so wonderful..." Her voice broke and she hurried from the room.

The afternoon of the following day, the groceryman's wife was among those who sought the temple minister's counsel.

The minister received those who came to him in rooms which were reached through one of the archways and passages from the main floor. Mrs. Paddock was met by a motherly woman, whose face under her silvery white hair was beautiful with that beauty which comes only to those who have passed through the fires of suffering. She explained that because so many called to see the minister it was necessary to have an attendant. She had volunteered for that service. If Mrs. Paddock would be seated in the main room she would call her when the minister was at liberty.

The groceryman's wife thanked the woman, then added: "Haven't we met somewhere before? Your face is strangely familiar."

The other answered gently, with a kindly smile: "No, Mrs. Paddock, we have never met, but I have been a member of your church for several years. You have, no doubt, seen me at the services. My husband died ten years ago; I lost my three sons in the War; I am alone in the world now."

In the quiet of the temple Mrs. Paddock waited. And as she sat there in that beautiful room where, during the months just passed she had come under a religious influence which had reawakened in her those deep and true emotions of wifeness and motherhood so long neglected and denied for lesser interests, she lived again the years that were gone. Her girlhood days—her farm home—Sunday school—the country church—the neighbor boy who won her heart—their university years together—the pond in the woods where he asked her to be his wife—their home-making in the city—the coming of their daughter—the baby son who stayed with them such a little while—the slow drifting from the home anchorage—the intrusion of other interests—the near, oh, so near, tragedy! Could she ever win back that which she had lost? Would her daughter ever forget—could she, herself, ever forget?

The woman with the silvery hair came to tell her that the minister could see her now, and she went to ask his advice and help. Could he help her?

Mrs. Paddock did not spare herself. She told the minister everything. Nor did she attempt to excuse or explain or justify what she had done.

When she had finished the minister spoke a few kindly, reassuring words and rose as if to end the interview.

The woman's heart sank with disappointment. "But what shall I do?" she faltered. "Can you not advise me? Is there—is there no hope that I can ever win back my place in my husband's life? Have I lost my daughter forever? Must I go on like this always?"

When the minister did not reply she started blindly toward the door through which she had entered.

Then he said quietly: "Not that way, Mrs. Paddock."

She paused and looked at him questioningly.

He stepped to another door and opening it, motioned her to pass through. As she crossed the threshold he smiled, and softly closed the door behind her.

"Georgia!"

"Mother!"

It was some time later when the daughter explained how she too had come to the minister for advice. When she had told him the whole pitiful story, he had asked her to remain for a little while. Then he had asked the silvery haired woman to send for Mrs. Paddock and was told that Georgia's mother was already there, waiting to see him.

The groceryman dined with Mr. Saxton at the hotel that evening, and then spent the hours until midnight at the meeting of the Foundation trustees.

The next morning it happened that Georgia was a few minutes late for breakfast.

While he waited, Joe picked up the morning paper to glance at the headlines. Mrs. Paddock, standing by the fireplace, was smiling happily to herself as if anticipating a pleasure.

Then their daughter appeared in the doorway and at her cheery "Good morning, folks," the groceryman looked up and saw the girl go to her mother, who received her with a kiss. Laughing at the expression on his face, Georgia pulled her father to his feet, and the three went in to breakfast.

The maid had not forgotten the fruit knives that morning. The fruit, apparently, was very satisfactory. But the

groceryman was puzzled. Something had happened—or was going to happen. His wife and daughter seemed to be sharing a secret and judging from their faces, they were having a lot of fun out of it.

Presently Mrs. Paddock asked: “Joe, have you anything of particular importance for this afternoon?”

“Why?”

“I’d like to go to the farm.”

He stared at her in blank amazement. Laura Louise Paddock had not for many years suggested that she would *like* to do anything. She had merely announced what she was going to do, and ordered her groceryman husband to make his plans accordingly.

“Well?” he said at last.

“I thought,” murmured Mrs. Paddock, while Georgia hid a smile in her napkin, “that you might like to take me. It’s such a beautiful day and—and there will be a lovely moon.”

“Fine,” said the groceryman, meeting the situation heartily. “If Georgia can get off we’ll all go. I’ll phone mother to have Hetty fry us a couple of chickens. There are some that ought to be about ripe now.”

Georgia looked at her mother and deliberately winked—a wink which caused Mrs. Paddock to blush like a girl.

“Sorry, Daddy, but you’ll have to excuse me to-day.”

As soon as their midday meal was over, the groceryman and his wife started for the country, and their daughter, as she watched them go, thought her mother the most beautiful woman in Westover.

Georgia felt a little lonely as she set out for the office. Considering everything it was not strange that the girl’s

thoughts were of the man she loved, and that her heart should be filled with a great longing. Nor was it strange that in her mood she should stop at the temple.

For some time she was alone in the great room. The solemn beauty of the place—the soft light—the shadowy arches—the lovely color—the stillness—soothed and comforted her. The spirit of the temple gave her strength and courage and hope. Something seemed to whisper a promise.

Presently, she felt that she was not alone. Some one had entered the temple and was sitting not far away. She did not move—not even to turn her head—but she knew who it was.

After a little, she felt him coming slowly toward her. She sat very still, with her head bowed—her face hidden.

Then he was in the chair beside her.

And then....

The late afternoon sun that day made lanes of gold between the trees in the Paddock woods and shot arrows of light through the leaves and branches, while the pond in the hollow was a moss green cup of liquid amber.

Under the old tree, which had heard their first love vows, the groceryman and his wife put away the mistakes of the years that were past, and together began a new and more abundant life. They were so engrossed in their happiness that they did not hear the automobile which had stopped at the edge of the woods on the old East Road.

Then the sound of some one approaching startled them, and, as they might have done when they were boy and girl, they slipped away through the bushes to hide from the

curious gaze of whoever it was that had chanced to come upon that sacred spot at the wrong moment.

Mrs. Paddock suddenly caught her husband's arm with a little gasp of happy amazement.

The groceryman, manlike, laughed—but softly—so as not to disturb those younger lovers to whom also that place was holy ground.

THE END

[The end of *God and the Groceryman* by Harold Bell Wright]