

The Bloomfield Times.

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THE PARSON IN TROUBLE.

WE were in disgrace, we boys, and the reason of it was this: we had laughed out in meeting time! To be sure the occasion was a trying one, even to more disciplined nerves. Parson Lothrop had exchanged pulpits with Parson Summeral of North Warem. Now Parson Summeral was a man in the very outset likely to provoke the risibles of unspiritualized juveniles. He was a thin, wiry, frisky little man, in a powdered white wig, black tights, and silk stockings, with bright knee buckles and shoe buckles, with round, dark, snapping eyes, and a curious, high, cracked, squeaking voice, the very first tones of which made all the children stare and giggle. The news that Parson Summeral was going to preach in our village spread abroad as a prelude to something funny. It had a flavor like the charm of circus acting, and on the Sunday morning of our story we went to the house of God in a very hilarious state, all ready to set off in a laugh on the slightest provocation.

The occasion was not long wanting. Parson Lothrop had a favorite dog yclept Trip, whose behavior in meeting was notoriously far from that edifying pattern which befits a minister's dog on Sundays. Trip was a nervous dog, and a dog that could never be taught to conceal his emotions or to respect conventionalities. If anything about the performance in the singers' seat did not please him, he was apt to express himself in a lugubrious howl. If the sermon was longer than suited him, he would gape with such a loud creak of his jaws as would attract everybody's attention. If the flies disturbed his afternoon's nap, he would give sudden snarls or snaps; or, if anything troubled his dreams, he would bark out in his sleep in a manner not only to dispel his own slumbers, but those of certain worthy deacons and old ladies, whose sanctuary repose was thereby sorely troubled and broken. For all these reasons, Madam Lothrop had been forced, as a general thing, to deny Trip the usual sanctuary privileges of good family dogs in that age, and shut him up on Sundays to private meditation. Trip, of course, was only the more set on attendance, and would hide behind doors, jump out of windows, sneak through by-ways and alleys, and lie hid till the second bell had done tolling, when suddenly he would appear in the broad aisle, innocent and happy, and take his seat as composedly as any member of the congregation.

Imagine us youngsters on the *qui vive* with excitement at seeing Parson Summeral frisk up to the pulpit with all the vivacity of a black grasshopper. We looked at each other and giggled very cautiously, with due respect to Aunt Lois' sharp observation.

At first there was only a quiet, mild simmery of giggle, compressed decorously within the bounds of propriety, and we pursed our muscles up with stringent resolution whenever we caught the apprehensive eyes of our elders.

But when, directly after the closing notes of the tolling second bell, Master Trip walked gravely up the centre aisle, and seating himself squarely in front of the pulpit, raised his nose with a critical air toward the scene of the forthcoming performance, it was too much for us—the repression was almost convulsive. Trip wore an alert, attentive air, befitting a sound, orthodox dog, who smells a possible heresy, and deems it his duty to watch the performance narrowly.

Evidently he felt called upon to see who and what were to occupy that pulpit in his master's absence.

Up went Parson Summeral, and up went Trip's nose, vibrating with intense attention.

The parson began, in his high, cracked voice, to intone the hymn:

"Sing to the Lord aloud,"
when Trip broke out into a dismal howl.

The parson went on to give directions to the deacon in the same voice in which he had been reading, so that the effect of the whole performance was somewhat as follows:

"Sing to the Lord aloud,"
(Please to turn out that dog)—
"And make a joyful noise."

The dog was turned out, and the choir did their best to make a joyful noise, but we boys were upset for the day, delivered over to the temptations of Satan, and plunged in waves and billows of hysterical giggle, from which neither winks nor frowns from Aunt Lois, nor the awful fear of the tithing man, nor the comforting bits of fennel and orange peel passed us by grandmother, could recover us.

Everybody felt, to be sure, that here was a trial that called for some indulgence. Hard faces, even among the stoniest saints, betrayed a transient quiver of the risible muscles, old ladies put up their fans, youths and maidens in the singers' seat laughed outright, and for a moment a general snicker among the children was pardoned. But I was one of the luckless kind whose nerves, once set in vibration, could not be composed. When the reign of gravity and decorum had returned, Harry and I sat by each other, shaking with suppressed laughter. Everything in the subsequent exercises took a funny turn, and in the long prayer, when everybody else was silent and decorous, the whole scene came over me with such overpowering force that I exploded with laughter, and had to be taken out of meeting and marched home by Aunt Lois, a convicted criminal. What especially moved her indignation was that the more she rebuked and upbraided, the more I laughed, till the tears rolled down my cheeks. Which Aunt Lois construed into willful disrespect to her authority, and resented accordingly.

By Sunday evening, as we gathered around the fire, the reaction from undue gaiety to sobriety had taken place, and we were in a pensive and penitent state. Grandmother was gracious and forgiving, but Aunt Lois still preserved that frosty air of reprobation which she held to be a salutary means of quickening our consciences for the future. It was, therefore, with unusual delight that we saw our old friend Sam come in and sit himself quietly down on the block in the chimney corner. With Sam we felt assured of indulgence and patronage, for though always rigidly moral and instructive in his turn of mind, he had that fellow feeling for transgressors which is characteristic of the loose-jointed, easy-going style of his individuality.

"Lord massy, boys—yis," said Sam, virtuously, in view of some of Aunt Lois' thrusts, "ye never ought to laugh nor out up in meetin', that are's so, but then there is times when the best on us gets took down. We gets took unawares, ye see—even ministers does. Yis, natur' will git the upper hand afore they know it."

"Why Sam, ministers don't ever laugh in meetin' do they?"

We put the question with wide eyes. Such a supposition bordered on profanity, we thought; it was approaching the sin of Uzziah, who unwarily touched the ark of the Lord.

"Laws, yes. Why, haven't you never heard how there was a council held to try Parson Morrel for laughing out in prayer-time?"

Laughing out in prayer-time! we both repeated, with uplifted hands and eyes.

My grandfather's mild face became luminous with a suppressed smile which brightened it as the moon does a cloud, but he said nothing.

"Yes, yes," said my grandmother, "that affair did make a dreadful scandal in the time on't. But Parson Morrel was a good man, and I am glad the council wasn't hard on him."

"Wal," said Sam Lawson, "after all, it was more Ike Babbit's fault than 'twas anybody's. Ye see, Ike, he was allers for gettin' what he could out of the town, and he would feed his sheep on the meetin'-house green. Somehow or other, Ike's fences allers contrived to give out, come Sunday, and up would come his sheep, and Ike was too pious to drive 'em back, Sunday, so there they was. He was talked to enough about it, cause you see, to have sheep and lambs a ba-a-in' and a blat'n' all sermon time, wa'nt the thing. 'Member that old meetin'-house up to the north end, down under Blueberry hill, the land sort o' sloped down, so as a body had to come

into the meetin'-house steppin' down instead o' up.

"Fact was, they said 'twas put there 'cause the land wa'n't good for nothing else, and the folks thought puttin' a meetin'-house on't would be a clear savin'—but Parson Morrel he didn't like it—and was free to tell 'em his mind on't that 'twas like bringin' the lame and the blind to the Lord's sarvice,—but there 'twas.

"There warn't a better minister nor no one more set by in all the State than Parson Morrel. His doctrines were right up and down good and sharp, and he give saints and sinners their meat in due season, and for consol'n' and comfortin' wid-ders and orphans women, sot lots by him and he was allus' ready to take tea round, and make things pleasant and comfortable, and he had a good story for every one and a word for the children, and may be an apple or a cookie in his pocket for 'em. Wal, you know there ain't no pleasin' everybody, and ef Gabriel himself, come right down out o' heaven, was to come and be a minister I expect there'd be a pickin' at his wings, and a sort o' fault findin'. Now Aunt Jerushy Scran and Aunt Polly Hokum they sed Parson Morrel wan't solemn enough. Ye see there's them that thinks that a minister ought to be just like the town hearse, so that ye think o' death, judgment and eternity, and nothin' else, when ye see him round; and ef they see him rosy and chipper, and havin' a pretty nice sociable sort of a time, why they say he ain't spiritooal minded. But in my times I've seen ministers, the most awakenin' kind in the pulpit, that was the liveliest when they was out on't. There is a time to laugh, scripture says, though some folks never seem to remember that there is."

"But, Sam, how came you to say it was Ike Babbit's fault? What was it about the sheep?"

"Oh, wal, yis—I'm comin' to that are. It was all about the sheep—I expect they was the instrument the devil sot to work, to temp Parson Morrel to laugh in prayer-time.

"Ye see there was old Dick, Ike's bell-wether, was the fightin' old critter that ever ye see. Why Dick would butt at his own shadder and every body said it was a shame the old critter should be left to run loose, 'cause he ran at the children and scared the women half out their wits. Wal, I used to live out in that parish in them days, and Lem Sudoc and I used to go out sparkin' Sunday nights to see the Larkin gals—and we had to go right 'cross the lot where Dick was—so we used to go and stand at the fence and call, and Dick would see us and put down his head and at us full chisel, and come bunt agin the fence and then I'd catch him by the horns and hold him while Lem run and got over fence on t'other side of the lot, and then I'd let go and Lem would holler and shake a stick at him and away he would go full butt at Lem, and Lem would ketch his horns and hold him till I came over—that was the way we managed Dick—but ef he come sudden up behind a feller, he'd give him a butt in the small of the back that would make him run on all fours one while—he was a great rogue, Dick was. Wal, that Summer I remember they had old Deacon Titkins for tithing-man and I tell you he give it to the boys lively. There warn't no sleepin' nor no playin', for the deacon had eyes like a gimblet, and he was quick as a cat, and the youngsters hed to look out for themselves. It did really seem as if the deacon was like them four footed beasts in the Revelations that was full o' eyes behind and before, for which ever way he was standin' if you gave only a wink, he was down on you and hit you a tap with his stick. I know once Lem Sudoc just wrote two words in the psalm-book and passed it to Keziah Larkin, and the deacon gave him such a tap that Lem grew as red as a beet and vowed he'd be up with him some day for that.

"Wal, you may believe, that broke up the meetin' for one while, for Parson Morrel laughed out, and all the gals and boys they stomped and roared, and the old deacon he got up and begun rubbing his shins—'cause he didn't see the joke on't."

"You don't utter laugh," says he, "it's no laughing matter—it's a solemn thing," says he. I might have been sent into 'tarnity by that darned critter," says he. Then they all roared and haw-hawed the more to see the deacon dancin' round with his little shiny head, so smooth a fly would trip up on't. "I believe my soul, you'd laugh to see me in my grave," says he!

"Wal, the truth on't 'twas jest one of them bustin' up times that natur has, when there ain't nothin' for it but to give in, 'twas jest like the ice breakin' up in the Charles river—it all comes at once and no whoa to it, Sunday or no Sunday, sin or no sin, the most on 'em laughed till they cried, and couldn't help it.

"But the deacon he went home feelin' pretty sore about it. Lem Sudoc he picked up his wig and handed it to him. Says he, 'old Dick was playing tithing-man, wan't he, deacon? Teach you to make allowance for other folks that get sleepy.'"

"Then Mrs. Titkins she went over to Aunt Jerushy Scran's and Aunt Polly Hokum's, and they hed a pot o' tea over it, and 'greed it was awful of Parson Morrel to set sich an example, and suthin' had got to be done about it. Miss Hokum said she allers knew that Parson Morrel hadn't no spiritooality, and now it had broke out into open sin, and led all the rest of 'em into it, and Mrs. Titkins she said such a man wan't fit to preach, and Miss Hokum said she couldn't never hear him again, and the next Sunday the deacon and his wife they hitched up and driv eight miles over to Parson Luthrop's and took Aunt Polly on the back seat.

"Wal, the thing growed and growed, till it seemed as if there warn't nothin' else talked about, 'cause Aunt Polly and Miss Titkins and Jerushy Scran they didn't do nothin' but talk about it, and that sot everybody else a talkin'.

"Finally it was 'greed they must hev' a council to settle the hash. So all the wim-wim went to chopping mince, and making up pumpkin pies, and cranberry tarts, and bilin' doughnuts, gettin' ready for the ministers and delegates—'cause councils always acts powerful—and they had quite a stir, like a general trainin'.

The hosses, they was hitched all up and down the stalls, a stompin' and switchin' their tails, and all the women was a talkin' and hed up everybody round for witnesses, and finally Parson Morrel he says: 'Brethren,' says he, 'jest let me tell you the story jest as it happened, and if you don't every one of you laugh as hard as I did, why, then I'll give up.'

The old meetin'-house stood right down at the foot of a hill that kep' off all the wind, and the sun blazed away at them great west winders, and there was a pretty sleepy time there. Wal, the deacon he flew round a spell, and woke up the children and tapped the boys on the head, and kep' everything straight as he could till the sermon was 'most through, when he rally got most tuckered out, and he took a chair and he sot down in the door right opposite the minister and fairly got asleep himself, jest as the minister got up to make the last prayer.

"Wal, Parson Morrel had a way o' prayin' with his eyes open. Folks said it wan't the best way, but it was. Parson Morrel's way anyhow, and so as he was prayin' he couldn't help seein' that Deacon Titkins was a noddin' and a bobbin' out toward the place where old Dick was feedin' with the sheep, front of the meetin'-house door.

"Lem and me was sittin' where we could look out and we jest see old Dick stop feedin' and look at the deacon. The deacon had a little round head as smooth as an apple, with a nice powdered wig on it, and he sot there making bows and bows and Dick begun to think it was suthin' sort o' passional. Lem and me was sittin' jest where we could look out and see the hull picter, and Lem was fit to split.

"Good, now," says he, "that critter'll pay the deacon off lively, pretty soon."

"The deacon bobbed his head a spell, and old Dick he shook his horns and stomped at him sort o' threatenin'. Finally the deacon he gave a great bow and brought his head right down at him, and old Dick he sot out full tilt and come down on him ker chunk, and knocked him head over heels into the broad aisle, and his wig flew one way and he t'other, and Dick made a plunge at it as it flew, and carried it off on his horns.

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"The parson he was a master hand at settin' off a story, and afore he'd done, he got 'em all in sich a roar they didn't know where to leave off. Finally, they give sentence that there hadn't no temptation took him but such as is common to man; but they advised him afterword allers to pray with his eyes shet, and the parson he confessed he orter a done it, and meant to do better in future, and so they settled it.

"So, boys," said Sam, who always drew a moral, "ye see it l'arns you you must take care what ye look at, ef ye want to keep from laughin' in meetin'."

A Smuggler's Narrative.

"WE shall be, my dear madam," said I to a fellow passenger on the Dieppe boat, taking out my watch, but keeping my eye steadily on her, "we shall be in less than ten minutes at the custom-house." A spasm—a flicker from the guilt within—gleamed from her countenance. "You look very good-natured, sir," stammered she. I bowed, and looked considerably more so to invite her confidence. "If I were to tell you a secret, which is too much for me to keep myself, oh! would you keep it inviolable?"

"I know it, my dear madam—I know it already," said I, smiling; "it is lace, is it not?" She uttered a little shriek, and yes—she had put it there among the crinoline. She thought it had been sticking out, you see, unknown to her. "Oh, sir!" cried she, it's only ten pounds' worth; please to forgive me and I'll never do it again. As it is, I think I shall expire." "My dear madam," replied I, sternly, but kindly, "here is the pier, and the officer has fixed his eye upon us, I must do my duty."

I rushed up the ladder like a lamplighter; I pointed out the woman to a legitimate authority; I accompanied her upon her way, in custody, to the searching house. I did not see her searched, but I saw what was found upon her, and I saw her fined and dismissed with ignominy. Then, having generously given up my emoluments as informer to the subordinate officials, I hurried off in search of the betrayed woman to her hotel. I gave her lace twice the value of that she had lost, paid her fine and explained.

"You, madam, had ten pounds' worth of smuggled goods about your person. I had nearly fifty times that amount. I turned informer, madam, let me convince you for the sake of both of us. You have too expressive a countenance, believe me, and the officer would have found you out at all events, as I did myself. Are you satisfied, my dear madam? If you still feel aggrieved by me in any way, pray take more lace, here's lots of it." When I finished my explanation the lady seemed perfectly satisfied with my little piece of diplomacy, though she would doubtless have preferred a less prominent part in it.

The Dog Clerk.

Rover's master was a merchant, and Rover was his errand-boy, or I suppose I should say his errand-dog. If any thing was to be sent home, papers, letters, meat, or what not, Rover was the one to carry it. He would even carry an egg in his mouth and lay it down on the kitchen-floor without breaking it. Perhaps you think this was no great feat, but then Rover doubtless thought it was, for he liked eggs dearly and to be obliged to carry one in his mouth without breaking it required some self-denial of his dog tastes.

Rover did a great many other useful things about the store, and once when his master was out he undertook to wait on customers. He went around behind the counter and put his fore-paws upon it, and looked at the ladies, as if he expected them to tell him what they wanted. Then they stood, astonished, looking at him, and he stood coolly waiting to take their orders when the merchant came in. I think that must have been a funny sight.

Michael Lenhy, who recently graduated at the Pittsfield (Mass.) High School at the age of 21 years, obtained his education under difficulties. When a child, while playing on the railroad track, he was run over by a train, and it was necessary to amputate both arms so close to the shoulder that no perceptible stumps are left. Nevertheless, he has persevered in his studies, has not been absent or tardy once in his four years' course at the High School, and has become a proficient in the branches there taught, turning the leaves of his book with his tongue. He has also acquired a very legible and even handsome style of penmanship, which he executes with his mouth.