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# MALCOM KIRK.

A Tale of Moral Heroism in Overcoming the World.

BY CHARLES M. SHELDON, Author of "In His Steps," "Crucifixion of Philip Strong," "Robert Hardy's Seven Days."

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## CHAPTER I.

The senior class in the theological seminary at Hermon had just had its picture taken by the photographer, and the members were still grouped about the steps of the chapel.

"There's one thing the photographer forgot," said a short, red faced man who sat in the middle of the group. "He didn't think to say, 'Look pleasant, now, if you please.'"

"He didn't need to. We all look so, anyhow." The man who spoke sat immediately behind the first speaker and had his hands on the other's shoulders.

"I'm sure we don't feel very pleasant. I mean, we are not pleased to think this is almost the last time we shall be together as a class," said a tall, delicate, pale faced man who was standing up at the top of the steps with his back against the door.

He spoke in a quiet, low voice, and there was a hush after he spoke. There is as much sentiment among theological students as among any average number of professional men. In some directions there is more than among the like number of law or medical students.

After a moment of silence some one began to ask questions about the future prospects of the class. The red faced, jolly looking young man in the center was going to take a church in northern Vermont. The man just behind him had received a call as assistant pastor of an institutional church in Philadelphia. The delicate featured student up by the chapel door was going to teach school a year and find a church as soon as he had paid off his college debts.

Every member of the class had spoken of his prospects except one. This one sat on the extreme edge of the group, as if he had purposely chosen to be as inconspicuous as possible in the picture. A stranger carelessly walking by would have instantly judged him to be the homeliest, least interesting man in the class. He had dull brown hair, very heavy and stiff, pale blue eyes, a rather large mouth, the lips of which, however, were firm and full of character, high cheek bones and an unusually high forehead. His arms and legs were very long, and his general attitude, as he sat on the edge of the steps, was almost strikingly awkward.

"Here's Kirk; hasn't said a word yet," cried the little man who had first spoken. "What are you going to do, Kirk?"

Every member of the class turned and looked at the figure sitting on the edge of the group. It was noticeable that while several of the class smiled at the question, "What are you going to do?" there was no disrespect in the smile, and on every man's face was a look of real interest, amounting to an excited curiosity.

Malcom Kirk smiled slightly as he looked up. He did not look at any member of the class in particular, but seemed to include them all in a friendly interest that was affectionate and gentle.

"I don't know. I am waiting for a call. I've had one and accepted it, but I need another before I can go to work."

Everybody stared. The man up by the chapel door had a look in his eye as if he understood what Kirk meant, but no one else seemed to catch his meaning.

"My first call was from the Lord, several years ago. I feel perfectly satisfied with it. He wants me to preach. But so far none of the churches seems to agree with him. At least none of them has asked me to preach. So I'm waiting for my second call."

He spoke without the least touch of irreverence or even humor. The impression made on the class was a feeling of honest perplexity concerning the future prospects of Malcom Kirk.

"I don't see," said the man who was to be the assistant pastor of the institutional church in Philadelphia, "why Kirk hasn't had a call to a large church. We all know he has more brains than all the rest of us put together. I think it is a shame the churches should pass by such a man and"

"It's easy enough to see the reason," Kirk spoke without the shadow of any irritation in his manner. "You fellows know as well as I do that brains under hair like mine don't count with the average city congregation." He laughed good naturedly, and the class joined him. Then some one said:

"Why don't you dye it black, Kirk?"

"I can't afford to," he replied gravely. "That isn't the only reason I don't get a call. I'm too awkward in the pulpit. Did I tell anybody the last time I preached in the Third church at Concord I knocked a vase of flowers off the pulpit with my elbow, and when it fell on the floor it waked up every officer in the church? Of course I never could expect to get a call from that church."

Everybody laughed, and Kirk drew one of his feet up under him and smiled a little. At the same time no one could detect a trace of ill humor or lack of seriousness in his tone or manner. The first impression Malcom Kirk made on people was that of downright sincerity. The longer people knew him the stronger this impression grew.

"That's nothing," exclaimed one of the class after the laugh subsided. "I had a great time two weeks ago when I went up to Manchester to preach. I laid my notes down on the desk, and there was a strong breeze blowing across the pulpit, which stood directly between two open windows, and while the anthem was being sung half my sermon blew out of one of the windows."

"The congregation was spared just so much, then, wasn't it?" said a man down on the bottom step.

"Accidents will happen to any one," said Kirk quietly. "But mine are not accidents; they're habits of life. I can overcome them, though. The churches don't know that; so I don't blame them for not giving me a call."

"Well, I think it's a shame, as I said," the assistant pastor of the institutional church repeated. "The churches think more of the way a man dresses and behaves in the pulpit than they do of what he says. And they criticize everything from his prayers to the polish of his boots."

There was silence again. The class had been over all that many times before, and they were practically a unit in their opinion of what the churches seemed to demand in a successful candidate for a call.

Finally some one occurred to the class picture again. "I don't believe Kirk's in this picture at all. He sat too far out. The photographer kept telling him to move in farther. But I believe he moved out again just at the last minute."

"I only moved one of my feet out," said Kirk solemnly. "I thought one of them was enough. I didn't want to have to pay extra for more than my share of the photograph."

"But we want the whole of you in the picture, Kirk," said the man next to him, laying an affectionate hand on Kirk's arm. The entire class turned again toward the awkward, shuffling figure and seemed to repeat the gesture of the one classmate. Then the talk drifted back again to the future plans of the members and to serious and humorous reminiscences of the three years' course until one after another went away and the class group was broken up into little knots of two and three as the men walked to their rooms or lingered under the great elms, arm in arm.

Kirk and the companion who had laid his hand on his friend's arm remained a little while on the steps. "What will you do, Kirk?" "I think I shall offer myself to the Home Missionary society and ask them to send me to the hardest place they can find out west somewhere."

"But how about all your scholarship, your—your ability?" The other man hesitated for the right word.

Kirk colored slightly, the first indication he had shown of a sensitiveness in that direction. "I can use anything I know anywhere. Preach I must, even if I have

to go into the streets and speak from the tail end of a wagon and never have a parish. But I do want a parish and a people. I can love people like everything. I feel hungry to have a parish of my own."

The other man was silent. He had never felt just like that, but he thought he could understand.

"I hope you will have such a church some time. I would like to be a member of it."

"Thank you!" Kirk smiled. "Wilson, if you were that church I would have a unanimous call. I am sure there is a work for me somewhere in God's great world, else why did he give me such a passion to speak to men and love them?"

Malcom Kirk looked out across the great seminary campus and spoke with a conscious cry of heart longing. The beautiful June day was nearly gone.

The future for him was as indefinite and unsettled as any condition can be. Yet the strong, patient, undisturbed realities of his call to preach the gospel were as unmovable as the sky of that lovely June day. The light would soon fade out of the heavens, but the sky would still remain.

The next day was commencement at Hermon seminary. The chapel was filled with a representative congregation of Hermon people, friends and relatives of the classes, the trustees and officers of the seminary and the usual number of undergraduates.

Before the speaking began the president of the faculty came forward to make the usual list of announcements concerning the annual prizes and scholarships.

It was the custom at Hermon for the annual announcements to be made at the close of the exercises of commencement. For some reason, however, this order was changed, and the audience listened with unusual interest to the president's remarks.

He had read the names of the winners in Hebrew and New Testament scholarship and the successful man in the general work of the entire course. He paused now at the end of the list and then read the last name, looking down at the graduating class as he did so:

"The German scholarship is awarded to Malcom Kirk of the graduating class."

There had been a slight rustling of applause as the different names were read, but when Kirk's name was spoken the class applauded vigorously, and the clapping extended over the chapel very heartily. Kirk sat bolt upright and blushed very red, and Wilson, who was sitting by him, exclaimed in a loud whisper: "Good! That means \$700 and a year abroad."

Kirk said nothing. There was no question he was pleased. His lips trembled, and he shuffled his feet under the pew, and his great hands opened and shut nervously. When his turn came to go up on the platform to speak, he felt as if his natural awkwardness and shyness had been doubled by the attention directed to him by the winning of the best scholarship in the gift of the seminary.

The minute he began to speak all this shyness disappeared. It was true Kirk loved to face an audience. He loved people, and after the first moment of conscious fright was passed he eagerly entered the true speaker's position and enjoyed both the audience and his own effort in addressing it.

His subject was "The Business of Preaching." What was it? How did it differ from oratory? What was the object of preaching? What were the materials of preaching? And so on. He spoke straight on, with his heart in what he said. It was in the thought of more than one minister in the audience that this man who had won the German scholarship had a remarkably good voice. More than one pastor felt like envying the peer or tone of that voice. It had a carrying quality that commanded attention and held it. And nearly every man on the seminary faculty was wondering why Kirk had received no call from any church. There was no question as to his ability. He had both brains and heart. It is true his face and figure were not in his favor. He was not of the orthodox ministerial cut. His clothes were not a very good fit. But were the churches looking for a fashion plate for an ornamental failure behind the pulpit?

In the audience that morning there were also two other persons who paid close attention to Kirk while he was speaking. One of these was a young man nearly Kirk's age, with a face and manner that spoke of the most sensitive, refined breeding. It was the face of a dreamer—dark eyes, wavy dark hair, handsome features, thin, delicate, curved lips and the hands of an artist. His clothes were made of the finest material and bore the stamp of that unconscious gentlemanly feeling which always goes with a man who has all his life been used to expensive details. As he sat there listening to Malcom Kirk this morning Francis Raleigh was attracted by the voice of the speaker. He had listened to the others with a conventional interest that did not mean anything to him. He started the moment that Kirk spoke the first word and fastened his look upon him until he was through. He then resumed his previous attitude of mild indifference to the programme.

The other person who followed Kirk's speech with especial interest was a young woman who sat in that part of the church reserved for the trustees of the seminary and their families. It is said that the young women who work in the nitroglycerin and dynamite establishment at Ardeer, Scotland, have the most perfect complexions in the world, owing to the nature of the peculiar materials they handle and breathe. It is very certain that Dorothy Gilbert had never lived or worked in any more explosive atmosphere than that of her own intense energy, but her face would fairly have rivalled that of any Scotch lass in Ardeer. There was a striking resemblance in many ways to Francis Raleigh's beauty. It might have been due to the similarity in training and in tastes. The New England type of independent, morally calm, but thoroughly interested activity was well represented in Dorothy Gilbert. Her father sat beside her, a dignified, carefully dressed man of 55, iron gray hair and mustache, a successful book publisher, with a beautiful home in Hermon and business in Boston. Dorothy was the only child at home. She had graduated a year before at Northampton and was now taking a special course in music, going to the city three days in the week.

She did not attempt to reason with herself about the interest she felt in Malcom Kirk's appearance. Theologues in general were mildly stupid creatures to her. She had been born and brought up in Hermon and classed

the theologues as a part of the fauna and flora of the town, but her interest had never gone any further than that. She had met Malcom Kirk several times during his three years' course. Once she had sat by him at a dinner given by her father to the class. She had found him an interesting talker and was surprised when she thought it over afterward. His homely hair, his shyness, his remarkable awkwardness, had amused her. She had laughed a little with her father about something that happened at the table. But she could not help listening to him today with added interest as he went on. Was it the voice? There was something very winning in it. There was none of the Yankee, New England nasal tone about it. It was full and deep and suggested an organ pipe exactly tuned.

Like Francis Raleigh, she seemed to lose all vital interest in the morning's programme when Kirk finished. While the next speaker was on the platform she turned her head to look over the



She followed Kirk's speech with especial interest.

chapel, and her eyes met those of Francis Raleigh. He smiled, and she returned the smile, while a slight color deepened on her face. And he thought to himself it was certainly more interesting to glance now and then at a face like Dorothy Gilbert's than to stare steadily at a tall, solemn young man on the platform who was talking about the "Philosophy of the Prophetic Idea" and its evolution in the Old Testament.

The programme was finished at last, and the friends of the graduates lingered about the platform congratulating the different speakers. Very many of the visitors came up and warmly greeted Kirk. Among them was one alert, active, middle aged man who said he wanted to see Kirk especially on a matter of importance. So the two went up to Kirk's room, and the stranger explained his business briefly.

## CHAPTER II. KIRK RECEIVES HIS SECOND CALL AND ACTS UPON IT.

"I'm superintendent of missions for Kansas. I want you to take a church out there. You're just the man I've been looking for. Don't say 'No,' for I must have you."

Kirk looked at the superintendent thoughtfully. Was this the second call he had mentioned?

"There's this scholarship. I feel the need of the training abroad."

"All right. Go on with that. But there's a church that will be ready for you at the end of your year there. It's in the growing town of Conrad and a great opening for hard work. The man there now will leave at the end of the year."

Kirk said nothing. He looked out of his window. Right across the campus stood the beautiful residence of Dorothy Gilbert's father. It was not the first time he had looked in that direction.

"Of course," continued the superintendent briskly, "you understand the church is a home missionary church and cannot offer you a large salary. They can raise perhaps \$400 or possibly \$450. The society will grant \$200 or \$250. You could count on about \$800 probably."

Kirk was silent. He turned his head away from the window and glanced around his room. The shabby backed books, the simple pieces of furniture, the faded carpet, the meager furnishings, all smote him keenly. It was not the first time his poverty had thrust itself upon him coarsely, but he seemed to feel it more deeply than ever. As he faced the superintendent who was waiting for a reply Kirk had a most astonishing and absurd feeling come over him. He was not thinking about his German scholarship or about the superintendent. The superintendent would have been swallowed in bewilderment if he could have read Kirk's thought. What Kirk was saying to himself was, "How can Dorothy Gilbert and I live on \$800 a year in a home missionary church?"

"Well," the superintendent spoke, with a slight trace of impatience, "what do you say? Give me a favorable answer. You can make your mark out there; plenty of hard work, but a good field. Tell me you'll take it."

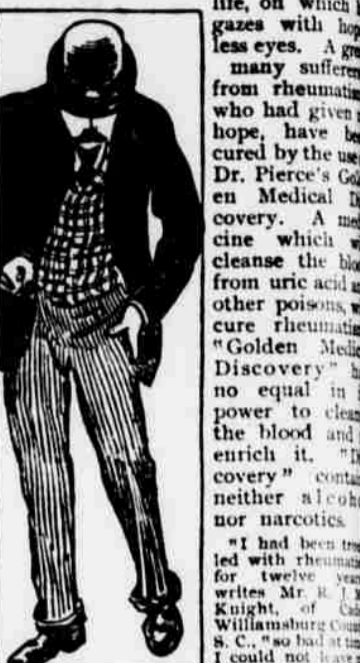
"Very well, I promise to take the field if it is open when I finish my studies abroad."

Kirk spoke quietly, but his lips closed firmly, and he turned his head and looked out over the campus again.

There was a little more talk between them, and the superintendent went out. The minute he was gone Kirk pulled down his curtains and locked his door. It was a little after noon, and the regular commencement dinner was served at 1. He walked up and down his darkened room talking to himself. His future was at last decided—at least for a time. He had some place in the world. Some one wanted him. He was

# "Ouch!"

That is about the mildest form of cry a man makes when rheumatism deals daily twacks him. In its worst form rheumatism is a living death. The victim, incapable of moving hand or foot, has no part in the great procession of life, on which he gazes with hopeless eyes. A great many sufferers from rheumatism who have given up hope, have been cured by the use of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. A medicine which cleanses the blood from uric acid and other poisons, will cure Rheumatism. "Golden Medical Discovery" is no equal in power to clean the blood and enrich it. "Golden Medical Discovery" contains neither alcohol nor narcotics.



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ambitious, as a Christian gentleman should be. He wanted to do great things in the kingdom of God on earth. Could he do them in that little home missionary church?

It was not at all contrary to his regular habits of life that he knelt down and prayed. It was a prayer of thanksgiving and also one of petition. He knew with perfect clearness as he knelt in his darkened room that loved Dorothy Gilbert with all his might. The complete absurdity of a position had nothing to do with the fact that he loved her. She was rich, she was accomplished, she was beautiful, she was of an old and distinguished family, but he loved her. He was poor, he was plain looking, he had no prospects beyond his scholarship of \$700 or \$800 a year in a home missionary church, but he loved Dorothy Gilbert. It made no difference to his Christian training seemed to be his choice of one so far removed from him in every way. That did not change it. In his prayer he cried for wisdom; he asked to be led by the Spirit.

He was not the man to waver a moment of Christian service on a passion of his heart, even if his hunger were not fed. But when he arose and went out to the alumni hall to join the class there at the final banquet he carried with him the knowledge that the future for him must have Dorothy Gilbert with it if he would do or be what he felt he had a right to pray for.

The week that followed commencement day at Hermon found Kirk most alone in the seminary building. He had been employed by one of the professors in doing some special copying of a book manuscript. In a few days this would be finished. He had fixed on the following Thursday to go for Liverpool. He had determined to begin his studies as soon as possible. He had been to see the president of the faculty about his scholarship and to his great relief, found that he was largely free to study in the way that seemed of most value to himself.

"You see, it's this way, sir," he explained to the president. "It will be very little good to go to a German university and take some special course in language or history. I feel the need of another method of study. If I use this scholarship to study under conditions in large cities, going to people for my material at first hand, will be of infinitely larger value to me."

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