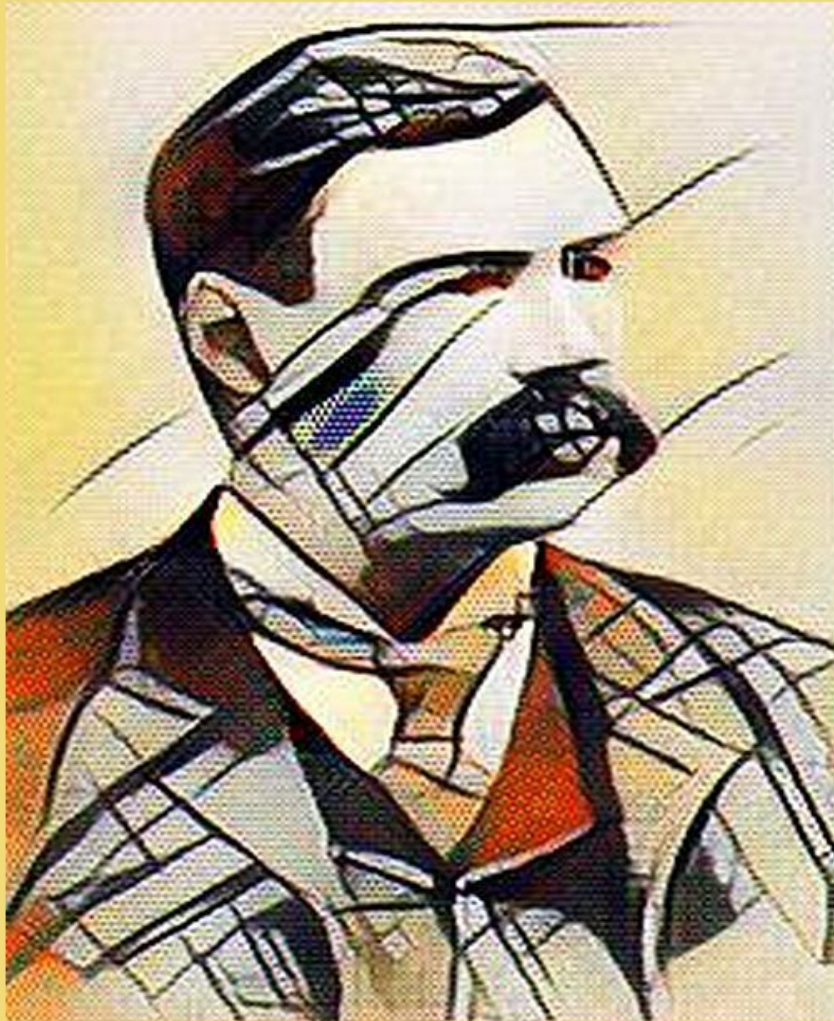


**HAROLD FREDERIC**



**THE DAMNATION  
OF THERON WARE**

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## **PART I**

### **CHAPTER I**

No such throng had ever before been seen in the building during all its eight years of existence. People were wedged together most uncomfortably upon the seats; they stood packed in the aisles and overflowed the galleries; at the back, in the shadows underneath these galleries, they formed broad, dense masses about the doors, through which it would be hopeless to attempt a passage.

The light, given out from numerous tin-lined circles of flaring gas-jets arranged on the ceiling, fell full upon a thousand uplifted faces—some framed in bonnets or juvenile curls, others bearded or crowned with shining baldness—but all alike under the spell of a dominant emotion which held features in abstracted suspense and focussed every eye upon a common objective point.

The excitement of expectancy reigned upon each row of countenances, was visible in every attitude—nay, seemed a part of the close, overheated atmosphere itself.

An observer, looking over these compact lines of faces and noting the uniform concentration of eagerness they exhibited, might have guessed that they were watching for either the jury's verdict in some peculiarly absorbing criminal trial, or the announcement of the lucky numbers in a great lottery. These two expressions seemed to alternate, and even to mingle vaguely, upon the upturned lineaments of the waiting throng—the hope of some unnamed stroke of fortune and the dread of some adverse decree.

But a glance forward at the object of this universal gaze would have sufficed to shatter both hypotheses. Here was neither a court of justice nor a tombola. It was instead the closing session of the annual Nedahma Conference of the

Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Bishop was about to read out the list of ministerial appointments for the coming year. This list was evidently written in a hand strange to him, and the slow, near-sighted old gentleman, having at last sufficiently rubbed the glasses of his spectacles, and then adjusted them over his nose with annoying deliberation, was now silently rehearsing his task to himself—the while the clergymen round about ground their teeth and restlessly shuffled their feet in impatience.

Upon a closer inspection of the assemblage, there were a great many of these clergymen. A dozen or more dignified, and for the most part elderly, brethren sat grouped about the Bishop in the pulpit. As many others, not quite so staid in mien, and indeed with here and there almost a suggestion of frivolity in their postures, were seated on the steps leading down from this platform. A score of their fellows sat facing the audience, on chairs tightly wedged into the space railed off round the pulpit; and then came five or six rows of pews, stretching across the whole breadth of the church, and almost solidly filled with preachers of the Word.

There were very old men among these—bent and decrepit veterans who had known Lorenzo Dow, and had been ordained by elders who remembered Francis Asbury and even Whitefield. They sat now in front places, leaning forward with trembling and misshapen hands behind their hairy ears, waiting to hear their names read out on the superannuated list, it might be for the last time.

The sight of these venerable Fathers in Israel was good to the eyes, conjuring up, as it did, pictures of a time when a plain and homely people had been served by a fervent and devoted clergy—by preachers who lacked in learning and polish, no doubt, but who gave their lives without dream of earthly reward to poverty and to the danger and wearing toil of itinerant missions through the rude frontier settlements. These pictures had for their primitive

accessories log-huts, rough household implements, coarse clothes, and patched old saddles which told of weary years of journeying; but to even the least sympathetic vision there shone upon them the glorified light of the Cross and Crown. Reverend survivors of the heroic times, their very presence there—sitting meekly at the altar-rail to hear again the published record of their uselessness and of their dependence upon church charity—was in the nature of a benediction.

The large majority of those surrounding these patriarchs were middle-aged men, generally of a robust type, with burly shoulders, and bushing beards framing shaven upper lips, and who looked for the most part like honest and prosperous farmers attired in their Sunday clothes. As exceptions to this rule, there were scattered stray specimens of a more urban class, worthies with neatly trimmed whiskers, white neckcloths, and even indications of hair-oil—all eloquent of citified charges; and now and again the eye singled out a striking and scholarly face, at once strong and simple, and instinctively referred it to the faculty of one of the several theological seminaries belonging to the Conference.

The effect of these faces as a whole was toward goodness, candor, and imperturbable self-complacency rather than learning or mental astuteness; and curiously enough it wore its pleasantest aspect on the countenances of the older men. The impress of zeal and moral worth seemed to diminish by regular gradations as one passed to younger faces; and among the very beginners, who had been ordained only within the past day or two, this decline was peculiarly marked. It was almost a relief to note the relative smallness of their number, so plainly was it to be seen that they were not the men their forbears had been.

And if those aged, worn-out preachers facing the pulpit had gazed instead backward over the congregation, it may be that here too their old eyes would have detected a



difference—what at least they would have deemed a decline.

But nothing was further from the minds of the members of the First M. E. Church of Tecumseh than the suggestion that they were not an improvement on those who had gone before them. They were undoubtedly the smartest and most important congregation within the limits of the Nedahma Conference, and this new church edifice of theirs represented alike a scale of outlay and a standard of progressive taste in devotional architecture unique in the Methodism of that whole section of the State. They had a right to be proud of themselves, too. They belonged to the substantial order of the community, with perhaps not so many very rich men as the Presbyterians had, but on the other hand with far fewer extremely poor folk than the Baptists were encumbered with. The pews in the first four rows of their church rented for one hundred dollars apiece—quite up to the Presbyterian highwater mark—and they now had almost abolished free pews altogether. The oyster suppers given by their Ladies' Aid Society in the basement of the church during the winter had established rank among the fashionable events in Tecumseh's social calendar.

A comprehensive and satisfied perception of these advantages was uppermost in the minds of this local audience, as they waited for the Bishop to begin his reading. They had entertained this Bishop and his Presiding Elders, and the rank and file of common preachers, in a style which could not have been remotely approached by any other congregation in the Conference. Where else, one would like to know, could the Bishop have been domiciled in a Methodist house where he might have a sitting-room all to himself, with his bedroom leading out of it? Every clergyman present had been provided for in a private residence—even down to the Licensed Exhorters, who were not really ministers at all when you came to think of it, and

who might well thank their stars that the Conference had assembled among such open-handed people. There existed a dim feeling that these Licensed Exhorters—an uncouth crew, with country store-keepers and lumbermen and even a horse-doctor among their number—had taken rather too much for granted, and were not exhibiting quite the proper degree of gratitude over their reception.

But a more important issue hung now imminent in the balance—was Tecumseh to be fairly and honorably rewarded for her hospitality by being given the pastor of her choice?

All were agreed—at least among those who paid pew-rents—upon the great importance of a change in the pulpit of the First M. E. Church. A change in persons must of course take place, for their present pastor had exhausted the three-year maximum of the itinerant system, but there was needed much more than that. For a handsome and expensive church building like this, and with such a modern and go-ahead congregation, it was simply a vital necessity to secure an attractive and fashionable preacher. They had held their own against the Presbyterians these past few years only by the most strenuous efforts, and under the depressing disadvantage of a minister who preached dreary out-of-date sermons, and who lacked even the most rudimentary sense of social distinctions. The Presbyterians had captured the new cashier of the Adams County Bank, who had always gone to the Methodist Church in the town he came from, but now was lost solely because of this tiresome old fossil of theirs; and there were numerous other instances of the same sort, scarcely less grievous. That this state of things must be altered was clear.

The unusually large local attendance upon the sessions of the Conference had given some of the more guileless of visiting brethren a high notion of Tecumseh's piety; and perhaps even the most sophisticated stranger never quite

realized how strictly it was to be explained by the anxiety to pick out a suitable champion for the fierce Presbyterian competition. Big gatherings assembled evening after evening to hear the sermons of those selected to preach, and the church had been almost impossibly crowded at each of the three Sunday services. Opinions had naturally differed a good deal during the earlier stages of this scrutiny, but after last night's sermon there could be but one feeling. The man for Tecumseh was the Reverend Theron Ware.

The choice was an admirable one, from points of view much more exalted than those of the local congregation.

You could see Mr. Ware sitting there at the end of the row inside the altar-rail—the tall, slender young man with the broad white brow, thoughtful eyes, and features moulded into that regularity of strength which used to characterize the American Senatorial type in those far-away days of clean-shaven faces and moderate incomes before the War. The bright-faced, comely, and vivacious young woman in the second side pew was his wife—and Tecumseh noted with approbation that she knew how to dress. There were really no two better or worthier people in the building than this young couple, who sat waiting along with the rest to hear their fate. But unhappily they had come to know of the effort being made to bring them to Tecumseh; and their simple pride in the triumph of the husband's fine sermon had become swallowed up in a terribly anxious conflict of hope and fear. Neither of them could maintain a satisfactory show of composure as the decisive moment approached. The vision of translation from poverty and obscurity to such a splendid post as this—truly it was too dazzling for tranquil nerves.

The tedious Bishop had at last begun to call his roll of names, and the good people of Tecumseh mentally ticked them off, one by one, as the list expanded. They felt that it was like this Bishop—an unimportant and commonplace

figure in Methodism, not to be mentioned in the same breath with Simpson and Janes and Kingsley—that he should begin with the backwoods counties, and thrust all these remote and pitifully rustic stations ahead of their own metropolitan charge. To these they listened but listlessly—indifferent alike to the joy and to the dismay which he was scattering among the divines before him.

The announcements were being doled out with stumbling hesitation. After each one a little half-rustling movement through the crowded rows of clergymen passed mute judgment upon the cruel blow this brother had received, the reward justly given to this other, the favoritism by which a third had profited. The Presiding Elders, whose work all this was, stared with gloomy and impersonal abstraction down upon the rows of blackcoated humanity spread before them. The ministers returned this fixed and perfunctory gaze with pale, set faces, only feebly masking the emotions which each new name stirred somewhere among them. The Bishop droned on laboriously, mispronouncing words and repeating himself as if he were reading a catalogue of unfamiliar seeds.

"First church of Tecumseh—Brother Abram G. Tisdale!"

There was no doubt about it! These were actually the words that had been uttered. After all this outlay, all this lavish hospitality, all this sacrifice of time and patience in sitting through those sermons, to draw from the grab-bag nothing better than—a Tisdale!

A hum of outraged astonishment—half groan, half wrathful snort bounded along from pew to pew throughout the body of the church. An echo of it reached the Bishop, and so confused him that he haltingly repeated the obnoxious line. Every local eye turned as by intuition to where the calamitous Tisdale sat, and fastened malignantly upon him.

Could anything be worse? This Brother Tisdale was past fifty—a spindling, rickety, gaunt old man, with a long horse-

like head and vacantly solemn face, who kept one or the other of his hands continually fumbling his bony jaw. He had been withdrawn from routine service for a number of years, doing a little insurance canvassing on his own account, and also travelling for the Book Concern. Now that he wished to return to parochial work, the richest prize in the whole list, Tecumseh, was given to him—to him who had never been asked to preach at a Conference, and whose archaic nasal singing of "Greenland's Icy Mountains" had made even the Licensed Exhorters grin! It was too intolerably dreadful to think of!

An embittered whisper to the effect that Tisdale was the Bishop's cousin ran round from pew to pew. This did not happen to be true, but indignant Tecumseh gave it entire credit. The throngs about the doors dwindled as by magic, and the aisles cleared. Local interest was dead; and even some of the pewholders rose and made their way out. One of these murmured audibly to his neighbors as he departed that HIS pew could be had now for sixty dollars.

So it happened that when, a little later on, the appointment of Theron Ware to Octavius was read out, none of the people of Tecumseh either noted or cared. They had been deeply interested in him so long as it seemed likely that he was to come to them—before their clearly expressed desire for him had been so monstrously ignored. But now what became of him was no earthly concern of theirs.

After the Doxology had been sung and the Conference formally declared ended, the Wares would fain have escaped from the flood of handshakings and boisterous farewells which spread over the front part of the church. But the clergymen were unusually insistent upon demonstrations of cordiality among themselves—the more, perhaps, because it was evident that the friendliness of their local hosts had suddenly evaporated—and, of all men in the world, the present incumbent of the Octavius pulpit

now bore down upon them with noisy effusiveness, and defied evasion.

"Brother Ware—we have never been interduced—but let me clasp your hand! And—Sister Ware, I presume—yours too!"

He was a portly man, who held his head back so that his face seemed all jowl and mouth and sandy chin-whisker. He smiled broadly upon them with half-closed eyes, and shook hands again.

"I said to 'em," he went on with loud pretence of heartiness, "the minute I heerd your name called out for our dear Octavius, 'I must go over an' interduce myself.' It will be a heavy cross to part with those dear people, Brother Ware, but if anything could wean me to the notion, so to speak, it would be the knowledge that you are to take up my labors in their midst. Perhaps—ah—perhaps they ARE jest a trifle close in money matters, but they come out strong on revivals. They'll need a good deal o' stirrin' up about parsonage expenses, but, oh! such seasons of grace as we've experienced there together!" He shook his head, and closed his eyes altogether, as if transported by his memories.

Brother Ware smiled faintly in decorous response, and bowed in silence; but his wife resented the unctuous beaming of content on the other's wide countenance, and could not restrain her tongue.

"You seem to bear up tolerably well under this heavy cross, as you call it," she said sharply.

"The will o' the Lord, Sister Ware—the will o' the Lord!" he responded, disposed for the instant to put on his pompous manner with her, and then deciding to smile again as he moved off. The circumstance that he was to get an additional three hundred dollars yearly in his new place was not mentioned between them.

By a mutual impulse the young couple, when they had at last gained the cool open air, crossed the street to the side

where over-hanging trees shaded the infrequent lamps, and they might be comparatively alone. The wife had taken her husband's arm, and pressed closely upon it as they walked. For a time no word passed, but finally he said, in a grave voice,—

"It is hard upon you, poor girl."

Then she stopped short, buried her face against his shoulder, and fell to sobbing.

He strove with gentle, whispered remonstrance to win her from this mood, and after a few moments she lifted her head and they resumed their walk, she wiping her eyes as they went.

"I couldn't keep it in a minute longer!" she said, catching her breath between phrases. "Oh, WHY do they behave so badly to us, Theron?"

He smiled down momentarily upon her as they moved along, and patted her hand.

"Somebody must have the poor places, Alice," he said consolingly. "I am a young man yet, remember. We must take our turn, and be patient. For 'we know that all things work together for good.'"

"And your sermon was so head-and-shoulders above all the others!" she went on breathlessly. "Everybody said so! And Mrs. Parshall heard it so DIRECT that you were to be sent here, and I know she told everybody how much I was lotting on it—I wish we could go right off tonight without going to her house—I shall be ashamed to look her in the face—and of course she knows we're poked off to that miserable Octavius.—Why, Theron, they tell me it's a worse place even than we've got now!"

"Oh, not at all," he put in reassuringly. "It has grown to be a large town—oh, quite twice the size of Tyre. It's a great Irish place, I've heard. Our own church seems to be a good deal run down there. We must build it up again; and the salary is better—a little."

But he too was depressed, and they walked on toward their temporary lodging in a silence full of mutual grief. It was not until they had come within sight of this goal that he prefaced by a little sigh of resignation these further words,—

"Come—let us make the best of it, my girl! After all, we are in the hands of the Lord."

"Oh, don't, Theron!" she said hastily. "Don't talk to me about the Lord tonight; I can't bear it!"



## CHAPTER II

"Theron! Come out here! This is the funniest thing we have heard yet!"

Mrs. Ware stood on the platform of her new kitchen stoop. The bright flood of May-morning sunshine completely enveloped her girlish form, clad in a simple, fresh-starched calico gown, and shone in golden patches upon her light-brown hair. She had a smile on her face, as she looked down at the milk boy standing on the bottom step—a smile of a doubtful sort, stormily mirthful.

"Come out a minute, Theron!" she called again; and in obedience to the summons the tall lank figure of her husband appeared in the open doorway behind her. A long loose, open dressing-gown dangled to his knees, and his sallow, clean-shaven, thoughtful face wore a morning undress expression of youthful good-nature. He leaned against the door-sill, crossed his large carpet slippers, and looked up into the sky, drawing a long satisfied breath.

"What a beautiful morning!" he exclaimed. "The elms over there are full of robins. We must get up earlier these mornings, and take some walks."

His wife indicated the boy with the milk-pail on his arm, by a wave of her hand.

"Guess what he tells me!" she said. "It wasn't a mistake at all, our getting no milk yesterday or the Sunday before. It seems that that's the custom here, at least so far as the parsonage is concerned."

"What's the matter, boy?" asked the young minister, drawling his words a little, and putting a sense of placid irony into them. "Don't the cows give milk on Sunday, then?"

The boy was not going to be chaffed. "Oh, I'll bring you milk fast enough on Sundays, if you give me the word," he said with nonchalance. "Only it won't last long."

"How do you mean—'won't last long'?", asked Mrs. Ware, briskly.

The boy liked her—both for herself, and for the doughnuts fried with her own hands, which she gave him on his morning round. He dropped his half-defiant tone.

"The thing of it's this," he explained. "Every new minister starts in saying we can deliver to this house on Sundays, an' then gives us notice to stop before the month's out. It's the trustees that does it."

The Rev. Theron Ware uncrossed his feet and moved out on to the stoop beside his wife. "What's that you say?" he interjected. "Don't THEY take milk on Sundays?"

"Nope!" answered the boy.

The young couple looked each other in the face for a puzzled moment, then broke into a laugh.

"Well, we'll try it, anyway," said the preacher. "You can go on bringing it Sundays till—till—"

"Till you cave in an' tell me to stop," put in the boy. "All right!" and he was off on the instant, the dipper jangling loud incredulity in his pail as he went.

The Wares exchanged another glance as he disappeared round the corner of the house, and another mutual laugh seemed imminent. Then the wife's face clouded over, and she thrust her under-lip a trifle forward out of its place in the straight and gently firm profile.

"It's just what Wendell Phillips said," she declared. "'The Puritan's idea of hell is a place where everybody has to mind his own business.'"

The young minister stroked his chin thoughtfully, and let his gaze wander over the backyard in silence. The garden parts had not been spaded up, but lay, a useless stretch of muddy earth, broken only by last year's cabbage-stumps and the general litter of dead roots and vegetation. The

door of the tenantless chicken-coop hung wide open. Before it was a great heap of ashes and cinders, soaked into grimy hardness by the recent spring rains, and nearer still an ancient chopping-block, round which were scattered old weather-beaten hardwood knots which had defied the axe, parts of broken barrels and packing-boxes, and a nameless debris of tin cans, clam-shells, and general rubbish. It was pleasanter to lift the eyes, and look across the neighbors' fences to the green, waving tops of the elms on the street beyond. How lofty and beautiful they were in the morning sunlight, and with what matchless charm came the song of the robins, freshly installed in their haunts among the new pale-green leaves! Above them, in the fresh, scented air, glowed the great blue dome, radiant with light and the purification of spring.

Theron lifted his thin, long-fingered hand, and passed it in a slow arch of movement to comprehend this glorious upper picture.

"What matter anyone's ideas of hell," he said, in soft, grave tones, "when we have that to look at, and listen to, and fill our lungs with? It seems to me that we never FEEL quite so sure of God's goodness at other times as we do in these wonderful new mornings of spring."

The wife followed his gesture, and her eyes rested for a brief moment, with pleased interest, upon the trees and the sky. Then they reverted, with a harsher scrutiny, to the immediate foreground.

"Those Van Sizars ought to be downright ashamed of themselves," she said, "to leave everything in such a muss as this. You MUST see about getting a man to clean up the yard, Theron. It's no use your thinking of doing it yourself. In the first place, it wouldn't look quite the thing, and, second, you'd never get at it in all your born days. Or if a man would cost too much, we might get a boy. I daresay Harvey would come around, after he'd finished with his milk-route in the forenoon. We could give him his dinner,

you know, and I'd bake him some cookies. He's got the greatest sweet-tooth you ever heard of. And then perhaps if we gave him a quarter, or say half a dollar, he'd be quite satisfied. I'll speak to him in the morning. We can save a dollar or so that way."

"I suppose every little does help," commented Mr. Ware, with a doleful lack of conviction. Then his face brightened. "I tell you what let's do!" he exclaimed. "Get on your street dress, and we'll take a long walk, way out into the country. You've never seen the basin, where they float the log-rafts in, or the big sawmills. The hills beyond give you almost mountain effects, they are so steep; and they say there's a sulphur spring among the slate on the hill-side, somewhere, with trees all about it; and we could take some sandwiches with us—"

"You forget," put in Mrs. Ware,— "those trustees are coming at eleven."

"So they are!" assented the young minister, with something like a sigh. He cast another reluctant, lingering glance at the sunlit elm boughs, and, turning, went indoors.

He loitered for an aimless minute in the kitchen, where his wife, her sleeves rolled to the elbow, now resumed the interrupted washing of the breakfast dishes—perhaps with vague visions of that ever-receding time to come when they might have a hired girl to do such work. Then he wandered off into the room beyond, which served them alike as living-room and study, and let his eye run along the two rows of books that constituted his library. He saw nothing which he wanted to read. Finally he did take down "Paley's Evidences," and seated himself in the big armchair—that costly and oversized anomaly among his humble house-hold gods; but the book lay unopened on his knee, and his eyelids half closed themselves in sign of reverie.

This was his third charge—this Octavius which they both knew they were going to dislike so much.

The first had been in the pleasant dairy and hop country many miles to the south, on another watershed and among a different kind of people. Perhaps, in truth, the grinding labor, the poverty of ideas, the systematic selfishness of later rural experience, had not been lacking there; but they played no part in the memories which now he passed in tender review. He recalled instead the warm sunshine on the fertile expanse of fields; the sleek, well-fed herds of "milkers" coming lowing down the road under the maples; the prosperous and hospitable farmhouses, with their orchards in blossom and their spacious red barns; the bountiful boiled dinners which cheery housewives served up with their own skilled hands. Of course, he admitted to himself, it would not be the same if he were to go back there again. He was conscious of having moved along—was it, after all, an advance?—to a point where it was unpleasant to sit at table with the unfragrant hired man, and still worse to encounter the bucolic confusion between the functions of knives and forks. But in those happy days—young, zealous, himself farm-bred—these trifles had been invisible to him, and life there among those kindly husbandmen had seemed, by contrast with the gaunt surroundings and gloomy rule of the theological seminary, luxuriously abundant and free.

It was there too that the crowning blessedness of his youth—nay, should he not say of all his days?—had come to him. There he had first seen Alice Hastings,—the bright-eyed, frank-faced, serenely self-reliant girl, who now, less than four years thereafter, could be heard washing the dishes out in the parsonage kitchen.

How wonderful she had seemed to him then! How beautiful and all-beneficent the miracle still appeared! Though herself the daughter of a farmer, her presence on a visit within the borders of his remote country charge had seemed to make everything, there a hundred times more countrified than it had ever been before. She was fresh

from the refinements of a town seminary: she read books; it was known that she could play upon the piano. Her clothes, her manners, her way of speaking, the readiness of her thoughts and sprightly tongue—not least, perhaps, the imposing current understanding as to her father's wealth—placed her on a glorified pinnacle far away from the girls of the neighborhood. These honest and good-hearted creatures indeed called ceaseless attention to her superiority by their deference and open-mouthed admiration, and treated it as the most natural thing in the world that their young minister should be visibly "taken" with her.

Theron Ware, in truth, left this first pastorate of his the following spring, in a transfiguring halo of romance. His new appointment was to Tyre—a somewhat distant village of traditional local pride and substance—and he was to be married only a day or so before entering upon his pastoral duties there. The good people among whom he had begun his ministry took kindly credit to themselves that he had met his bride while she was "visiting round" their countryside. In part by jocose inquiries addressed to the expectant groom, in part by the confidences of the postmaster at the corners concerning the bulk and frequency of the correspondence passing between Theron and the now remote Alice—they had followed the progress of the courtship through the autumn and winter with friendly zest. When he returned from the Conference, to say good-bye and confess the happiness that awaited him, they gave him a "donation"—quite as if he were a married pastor with a home of his own, instead of a shy young bachelor, who received his guests and their contributions in the house where he boarded.

He went away with tears of mingled regret and proud joy in his eyes, thinking a good deal upon their predictions of a distinguished career before him, feeling infinitely strengthened and upborne by the hearty fervor of their

God-speed, and taking with him nearly two wagon-loads of vegetables, apples, canned preserves, assorted furniture, glass dishes, cheeses, pieced bedquilts, honey, feathers, and kitchen utensils.

Of the three years' term in Tyre, it was pleasantest to dwell upon the beginning.

The young couple—after being married out at Alice's home in an adjoining county, under the depressing conditions of a hopelessly bedridden mother, and a father and brothers whose perceptions were obviously closed to the advantages of a matrimonial connection with Methodism—came straight to the house which their new congregation rented as a parsonage. The impulse of reaction from the rather grim cheerlessness of their wedding lent fresh gayety to their lighthearted, whimsical start at housekeeping. They had never laughed so much in all their lives as they did now in these first months—over their weird ignorance of domestic details; with its mishaps, mistakes, and entertaining discoveries; over the comical super-abundances and shortcomings of their "donation" outfit; over the thousand and one quaint experiences of their novel relation to each other, to the congregation, and to the world of Tyre at large.

Theron, indeed, might be said never to have laughed before. Up to that time no friendly student of his character, cataloguing his admirable qualities, would have thought of including among them a sense of humor, much less a bent toward levity. Neither his early strenuous battle to get away from the farm and achieve such education as should serve to open to him the gates of professional life, nor the later wave of religious enthusiasm which caught him up as he stood on the border-land of manhood, and swept him off into a veritable new world of views and aspirations, had been a likely school of merriment. People had prized him for his innocent candor and guileless mind, for his good heart, his pious zeal, his modesty about gifts notably above

the average, but it had occurred to none to suspect in him a latent funny side.

But who could be solemn where Alice was?—Alice in a quandary over the complications of her cooking stove; Alice boiling her potatoes all day, and her eggs for half an hour; Alice ordering twenty pounds of steak and half a pound of sugar, and striving to extract a breakfast beverage from the unground coffee-bean? Clearly not so tenderly fond and sympathetic a husband as Theron. He began by laughing because she laughed, and grew by swift stages to comprehend, then frankly to share, her amusement. From this it seemed only a step to the development of a humor of his own, doubling, as it were, their sportive resources. He found himself discovering a new droll aspect in men and things; his phraseology took on a dryly playful form, fittingly to present conceits which danced up, unabashed, quite into the presence of lofty and majestic truths. He got from this nothing but satisfaction; it obviously involved increased claims to popularity among his parishioners, and consequently magnified powers of usefulness, and it made life so much more a joy and a thing to be thankful for. Often, in the midst of the exchange of merry quip and whimsical suggestion, bright blossoms on that tree of strength and knowledge which he felt expanding now with a mighty outward pushing in all directions, he would lapse into deep gravity, and ponder with a swelling heart the vast unspeakable marvel of his blessedness, in being thus enriched and humanized by daily communion with the most worshipful of womankind.

This happy and good young couple took the affections of Tyre by storm. The Methodist Church there had at no time held its head very high among the denominations, and for some years back had been in a deplorably sinking state, owing first to the secession of the Free Methodists and then to the incumbency of a pastor who scandalized the community by marrying a black man to a white woman. But



the Wares changed all this. Within a month the report of Theron's charm and force in the pulpit was crowding the church building to its utmost capacity—and that, too, with some of Tyre's best people. Equally winning was the atmosphere of jollity and juvenile high spirits which pervaded the parsonage under these new conditions, and which Theron and Alice seemed to diffuse wherever they went.

Thus swimmingly their first year sped, amid universal acclaim. Mrs. Ware had a recognized social place, quite outside the restricted limits of Methodism, and shone in it with an unflagging brilliancy altogether beyond the traditions of Tyre. Delightful as she was in other people's houses, she was still more naively fascinating in her own quaint and somewhat harum-scarum domicile; and the drab, two-storied, tin-roofed little parsonage might well have rattled its clapboards to see if it was not in dreamland—so gay was the company, so light were the hearts, which it sheltered in these new days. As for Theron, the period was one of incredible fructification and output. He scarcely recognized for his own the mind which now was reaching out on all sides with the arms of an octopus, exploring unsuspected mines of thought, bringing in rich treasures of deduction, assimilating, building, propounding as if by some force quite independent of him. He could not look without blinking timidity at the radiance of the path stretched out before him, leading upward to dazzling heights of greatness.

At the end of this first year the Wares suddenly discovered that they were eight hundred dollars in debt.

The second year was spent in arriving, by slow stages and with a cruel wealth of pathetic detail, at a realization of what being eight hundred dollars in debt meant.

It was not in their elastic and buoyant natures to grasp the full significance of the thing at once, or easily. Their position in the social structure, too, was all against clear-

sightedness in material matters. A general, for example, uniformed and in the saddle, advancing through the streets with his staff in the proud wake of his division's massed walls of bayonets, cannot be imagined as quailing at the glance thrown at him by his tailor on the sidewalk. Similarly, a man invested with sacerdotal authority, who baptizes, marries, and buries, who delivers judgments from the pulpit which may not be questioned in his hearing, and who receives from all his fellow-men a special deference of manner and speech, is in the nature of things prone to see the grocer's book and the butcher's bill through the little end of the telescope.

The Wares at the outset had thought it right to trade as exclusively as possible with members of their own church society. This loyalty became a principal element of martyrdom. Theron had his creditors seated in serried rows before him, Sunday after Sunday. Alice had her critics consolidated among those whom it was her chief duty to visit and profess friendship for. These situations now began, by regular gradations, to unfold their terrors. At the first intimation of discontent, the Wares made what seemed to them a sweeping reduction in expenditure. When they heard that Brother Potter had spoken of them as "poor pay," they dismissed their hired girl. A little later, Theron brought himself to drop a laboriously casual suggestion as to a possible increase of salary, and saw with sinking spirits the faces of the stewards freeze with dumb disapprobation. Then Alice paid a visit to her parents, only to find her brothers doggedly hostile to the notion of her being helped, and her father so much under their influence that the paltry sum he dared offer barely covered the expenses of her journey. With another turn of the screw, they sold the piano she had brought with her from home, and cut themselves down to the bare necessities of life, neither receiving company nor going out. They never laughed now, and even smiles grew rare.

By this time Theron's sermons, preached under that stony glare of people to whom he owed money, had degenerated to a pitiful level of commonplace. As a consequence, the attendance became once more confined to the insufficient membership of the church, and the trustees complained of grievously diminished receipts. When the Wares, grown desperate, ventured upon the experiment of trading outside the bounds of the congregation, the trustees complained again, this time peremptorily.

Thus the second year dragged itself miserably to an end. Nor was relief possible, because the Presiding Elder knew something of the circumstances, and felt it his duty to send Theron back for a third year, to pay his debts, and drain the cup of disciplinary medicine to its dregs.

The worst has been told. Beginning in utter blackness, this third year, in the second month, brought a change as welcome as it was unlooked for. An elderly and important citizen of Tyre, by name Abram Beekman, whom Theron knew slightly, and had on occasions seen sitting in one of the back pews near the door, called one morning at the parsonage, and electrified its inhabitants by expressing a desire to wipe off all their old scores for them, and give them a fresh start in life. As he put the suggestion, they could find no excuse for rejecting it. He had watched them, and heard a good deal about them, and took a fatherly sort of interest in them. He did not deprecate their regarding the aid he proffered them in the nature of a loan, but they were to make themselves perfectly easy about it, and never return it at all unless they could spare it sometime with entire convenience, and felt that they wanted to do so. As this amazing windfall finally took shape, it enabled the Wares to live respectably through the year, and to leave Tyre with something over one hundred dollars in hand.

It enabled them, too, to revive in a chastened form their old dream of ultimate success and distinction for Theron. He had demonstrated clearly enough to himself, during

that brief season of unrestrained effulgence, that he had within him the making of a great pulpit orator. He set to work now, with resolute purpose, to puzzle out and master all the principles which underlie this art, and all the tricks that adorn its superstructure. He studied it, fastened his thoughts upon it, talked daily with Alice about it. In the pulpit, addressing those people who had so darkened his life and crushed the first happiness out of his home, he withheld himself from any oratorical display which could afford them gratification. He put aside, as well; the thought of attracting once more the non-Methodists of Tyre, whose early enthusiasm had spread such pitfalls for his unwary feet. He practised effects now by piecemeal, with an alert ear, and calculation in every tone. An ambition, at once embittered and tearfully solicitous, possessed him.

He reflected now, this morning, with a certain incredulous interest, upon that unworthy epoch in his life history, which seemed so far behind him, and yet had come to a close only a few weeks ago. The opportunity had been given him, there at the Tecumseh Conference, to reveal his quality. He had risen to its full limit of possibilities, and preached a great sermon in a manner which he at least knew was unapproachable. He had made his most powerful bid for the prize place, had trebly deserved success—and had been banished instead to Octavius!

The curious thing was that he did not resent his failure. Alice had taken it hard, but he himself was conscious of a sense of spiritual gain. The influence of the Conference, with its songs and seasons of prayer and high pressure of emotional excitement, was still strong upon him. It seemed years and years since the religious side of him had been so stirred into motion. He felt, as he lay back in the chair, and folded his hands over the book on his knee, that he had indeed come forth from the fire purified and strengthened. The ministry to souls diseased beckoned him with a new and urgent significance. He smiled to remember that Mr.

Beekman, speaking in his shrewd and pointed way, had asked him whether, looking it all over, he didn't think it would be better for him to study law, with a view to sliding out of the ministry when a good chance offered. It amazed him now to recall that he had taken this hint seriously, and even gone to the length of finding out what books law-students began upon.

Thank God! all that was past and gone now. The Call sounded, resonant and imperative, in his ears, and there was no impulse of his heart, no fibre of his being, which did not stir in devout response. He closed his eyes, to be the more wholly alone with the Spirit, that moved him.

The jangling of a bell in the hallway broke sharply upon his meditations, and on the instant his wife thrust in her head from the kitchen.

"You'll have to go to the door, Theron!" she warned him, in a loud, swift whisper. "I'm not fit to be seen. It is the trustees."

"All right," he said, and rose slowly from sprawling recumbency to his feet. "I'll go."

"And don't forget," she added strenuously; "I believe in Levi Gorringer! I've seen him go past here with his rod and fish-basket twice in eight days, and that's a good sign. He's got a soft side somewhere. And just keep a stiff upper lip about the gas, and don't you let them jew you down a solitary cent on that sidewalk."

"All right," said Theron, again, and moved reluctantly toward the hall door.

### CHAPTER III

When the three trustees had been shown in by the Rev. Mr. Ware, and had taken seats, an awkward little pause ensued. The young minister looked doubtingly from one face to another, the while they glanced with inquiring interest about the room, noting the pictures and appraising the furniture in their minds.

The obvious leader of the party, Loren Pierce, a rich quarryman, was an old man of medium size and mean attire, with a square, beardless face as hard and impassive in expression as one of his blocks of limestone. The irregular, thin-lipped mouth, slightly sunken, and shut with vice-like firmness, the short snub nose, and the little eyes squinting from half-closed lids beneath slightly marked brows, seemed scarcely to attain to the dignity of features, but evaded attention instead, as if feeling that they were only there at all from plain necessity, and ought not to be taken into account. Mr. Pierce's face did not know how to smile—what was the use of smiles?—but its whole surface radiated secretiveness. Portrayed on canvas by a master brush, with a ruff or a red robe for masquerade, generations of imaginative amateurs would have seen in it vast reaching plots, the skeletons of a dozen dynastic cupboards, the guarded mysteries of half a century's international diplomacy. The amateurs would have been wrong again. There was nothing behind Mr. Pierce's juiceless countenance more weighty than a general determination to exact seven per cent for his money, and some specific notions about capturing certain brickyards which were interfering with his quarry-sales. But Octavius watched him shamble along its sidewalks quite as the