HOWARD CHASE, RED HILL, KANSAS

CHARLES M SHELDON

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DEDICATORY NOTE

This story of a big man in a small town was first read to my own people on consecutive Sunday evenings during the winter of 1916.

In the book form, the author, who does not pretend to be indifferent to his audience, wishes, without any pretence at false modesty, that he might have the rare privilege of knowing that every minister of every church of every denomination had read this story. The conditions pictured here can be duplicated in hundreds of small towns in every state of the Union. The unnecessary waste of good men, money and messages is heartbreaking. If Christianity is going to have prophets, preachers and ministers who shall truly represent the Gospel, some radical changes must take place in the institution called the "church."

Those changes will not take place until the men who are at the head of the church as ministers and official members of Denominational Boards get a real vision of a church and its place in a community. The whole genius of the times in which we now live is towards some form of co−operative human effort for a common good, not for a special good for some special group in the community. If the nations are in a real sense fighting for a federated commercial and political union of mutual interests, it is time for the church to feel the truth of this community spirit, and find a way to reach the life of all the people and not a sect of it.

This story is dedicated, in a special sense, to all those, in pulpit and pew, who have seen the larger definition of the church and have felt its force in their hearts. In all the denominations a growing number is "nobly discontent" with church life as it is, specially in the small town. Some way must be feasible and workable to save the needless waste of men and means, and put the church in touch in a dignified way with all the community. This little story is not an answer to the problem of church federation; it is only a suggestion. But if the hearts of the people of all the different denominations are Christian enough, a way will be found to work out any problem.

The Community is greater than the denomination and Christianity is a larger thing than men's definition of it.

CHARLES M. SHELDON.

Topeka, Kansas, 1917.

Central Congregational Church.

PLACE: RED HILL, the most gossipy town in Kansas.

TIME: THE PRESENT.

ACTION: A Community life for a small, over−churched, financially prosperous little town in Kansas, where every event in the story has occurred in real existence. The one greatest social need of the age is the action of the story, not only for Kansas, but for every small town in every state in the United States.

Topeka, Kansas, 1917.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

HOWARD CHASE, Minister, Congregational Church.
HIS SISTER, Rose.
ROY LENNOX, his chum.
DEACON BURTON.
MRS. BURTON, his wife.
AGNES BURTON, his daughter, the High School Teacher.
REV. ALFRED NOYES, Methodist.
REV. GEORGE HARRIS, Presbyterian.
REV. HENRY GRAY, Baptist.
GEORGE CLARK, printer and inventor.
HIS DAUGHTER, Inez.
JAKE SEYMOUR, the "Movie" man.
DEACON ALLEN.
MRS. WILSON.
LITTLE MISS WILSON.
TEE AGENT.

THE EXPRESSMAN.

CHAPTER I.

Letter for you," said a young man, seated at a small desk in one corner of a small room, as another young man came briskly in and closed the door with a sharp swing, stopping it just in time to prevent it from banging.

With the same wide−awake, alert, but not noisy quickness, he stepped across the room and took the letter out of a pasteboard box nailed on a closet door, sat down at a table in the opposite corner of the room from where the other young man was seated, and opening the letter, read it, without any expression except that of continual and sustained wide awakeness.

Looking up, at the end of the letter, he slowly turned and glanced over at the other young man and nodded as if in answer to a spoken question.

"Yes, another one from Red Hill. Looks as if they really wanted me out there."

"That makes three you have had, besides two from the Superintendent. It does look as if they were short of material. Have they ever heard you preach?"

"No. I've never been in Kansas. Never west of the Ohio. But I've about made up my mind to go."

"No!" The other young man suddenly rose and came over and sat down on one end of the table by which the speaker was seated. "You don't mean it, do you, Howard?"

"Yes, I do, Roy. I've always wanted to go west and begin my ministry out there. It's new and full of possibility. There has always been something fascinating and alluring about the west. There is more room than there is here."

"Yes, there's not much room in little old New York. I've about made up my mind to decline every call I get to any church between the Bowery and 375th Street. But you're cut out for a big church, Howard. And a city church. And here you are planning to go out to a little country town in Kansas and bury yourself in a place called Red Hill. `Red,' I suppose, because there never was any `red' there, and `Hill' because it's flatter than usual."

"I've never seen a picture of the spot, Roy. But I don't care about that. I've about made up my mind to go. And there's another reason—−" His wide−awake, absolutely sleepless face grew just a shadow more thoughtful. "There's Rose. She needs a change. The doctor says the climate out there ought to be good for her. And she seems rather eager to go—−"

"How is your sister?" his roommate asked gently, as if the question was an old one, the answer to which always conveyed a story of a home tragedy.

"She is some better. But since father's death she has been alone. We're the only ones left. She will be able to keep house for me out there."

"Howard, you ought to have a wife. You've promised to stay and see Kate and me married. I don't ever expect to get a call to any church. But I'm going to have a wife, anyhow. That much I'm sure of."

Howard Chase looked at his roommate and chum and smiled.

"I can see Kate and you settled over an ideal parish. She will straighten out your theology and your confused habits generally. But I've never seen any one I dare ask to be a ministers wife."

"You'll probably meet her at Red Hill," said Roy Lennox, laughing. They both laughed.

If they had been able to see five years into the future they would not have laughed. I wonder what they would have done? What would any of us do if we could raise the curtain on five years from now? It would be a look at divinely hidden scenes, mercifully shut out of our human history.

"How about this Red Hill, Howard? What sort of a place is it, anyhow?"

"The Superintendent has written quite fully. He says it's an average Kansas town. Seven hundred and fifty people. Mostly. American. A sprinkling of German, Swede and Norwegian farmers outside. One main street for business. A high school. A county court house. And four churches. Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Congregational."

"That simplifies matters some," said Lennox, gravely.

"What does? Simplifies what?"

"Why, there are only four churches. There might be five or six."

"I won't try to run but one, Roy. That will keep me busy."

"Four is in seven hundred one hundred and seventy−five times. If everybody in Red Hill should go to church on Sunday you would have a fair audience. I don't believe I could get that many people to come and hear me preach more than once."

"I'm not worrying over that," Howard replied. "If the other churches can get more people than ours it will be my fault."

"You haven't said anything about the salary. What will they pay?"

"Let's see." Howard looked over a pile of letters on the table and opened two or three. "O yes. Here it is. The Superintendent says they are willing to give $900 and use of parsonage. It seems the church has just gone to self−support and they find it rather hard to raise the amount. But he thinks they can do it if the right man is secured."

"How did the Superintendent happen to pick on you as the right man?"

"He was a classmate of my father in the seminary. In his letters, you remember, he says he has always taken a great interest in me, and thinks I would fit in at Red Hill. He says the people want a young man. I happen to fit that requirement. They also want a young man of energy. The last man they had lacked aggressiveness and lost out to the other churches. The Superintendent has assured them I am energetic and they are willing to take his word for it."

"I can give them a recommend along that line, Howard. You have the most wide−awake face I ever saw. You don't look sleepy at any time. I don't know what you sleep for, anyhow. I never saw you look tired."

"My father always had the same look. It goes with all the Chase family. I can't help it."

"Don't try to. It is a great card with strangers. The first thing the people of Red Hill will say when they see you will be: `Well, he's a wide−awake looking young fellow. I'll bet he was born in Kansas, all right. He wasn't raised in New York or New Jersey.'" Howard Chase laughed. And when he laughed his expressive face fairly radiated life. It took on the glow of a good portrait suddenly illuminated by a beam of sunlight streaming into an old gallery through a rich stained glass window.

"What other qualifications do they want at Red Hill besides youth and energy? Any brains mentioned?"

"Yes. The Superintendent says they want a young man of keen intellectual grasp. Some one who is not afraid of study and can keep up with the best thought."

"All for $900," said Roy, gravely.

"And at the same time," Howard grinned. "They want a conservatively spiritually minded preacher who will not chase after every new fad in religion or run head on collisions in theology. Kansas people are progressive conservatives when it comes to religion."

"What are some of the other qualifications besides youth, energy, brains, and religion?"

"Why, according to the Superintendent, they want a college graduate, and if he can play the organ and lead the music it will be a great help, but the last isn't absolutely necessary."

"Lucky for you since you don't know the `Hallelujah Chorus' from `John Brown's Body.' What else do the friends in Red Hill like?"

"They want some one who is popular with young people and a good administrator, and if possible, some one who can keep up the finances."

"You can do that, all right. Any man who can board and clothe and room himself and get an education on three hundred dollars a year without any visible means of support like you during the time I've known you is a professional financier. You can qualify on that point."

"Yes," said Howard, grinning again with a sense of humor that was going to save him in moments of deepest tragedy. "They can borrow money off of me on nine hundred dollars a year if they really pay it. But the Superintendent mentions another thing that I'm not so sure of."

"What's that?"

"He says any one who goes into that field will have to compete at present with three other men, all of whom are hustlers and fairly good preachers and administrators."

"I thought you said a minute ago that if the other churches got more people than yours it would be your fault."

"And it will. Maybe I can prevent it. But I don't feel sure on that point. Somehow it seems humiliating to go proselyting around among other ministers' folds in order to fill up your own. I don't believe I can do that. The only thing I can do is to make my church services and programme so interesting that the people will choose my church

instead of the others."

"If you succeed, the result on the other churches will be the same as if you went into their folds and stole their pet lambs by night, won't it?"

"I suppose it will. But what would you have me do? Less than my level best? If I can get the people of Red Hill to come to the Congregational Church instead of the Methodist, Presbyterian or Baptist they won't lose anything. They will be getting progressively conservative religion. But I can't toady to people, and I won't ask anybody to come to my church instead of the others. I've got to make it more worth their while to come to me than to the others."

"I can see grass growing over the walks leading up to the M. E., Presbyterian and Baptist churches, already, Howard. There isn't one of those preachers can hold a candle to you on good looks and blarney generally. The young folks will come over to you in a body. The yellow−legged chickens will fall on their backs when you make your calls and are invited to stay to dinner. Flowers will adorn your pulpit. Slippers will grace your Christmas trees. And the local editor will print Monday morning extracts from your sermon. `See the conquering hero comes' will resound up and down the one business street of Red Hill when you make your daily triumphant pilgrimage up and down it from the corner grocery to the post office and back. And then, after a romantic marriage with the fair daughter of your senior deacon, who has fallen in love with you at sight, in a rosy cloud I see you buying a ticket to a metropolitan pulpit that has extended a call to—−"

"Stop! I won't listen to your prophecies any longer. At the same time, I don't see how I'm to blame if I use any and every talent I possess to win the populace of Red Hill to my church. And yet, somehow, as I started to say when you interrupted with your blarney, I don't believe I can or will do some of the things the Red Hill people will probably want me to do in the matter of aggressiveness."

"No, you're such a mild, meek fellow! I'm sorry, though, for the other ministers in Red Hill. They will be ringing their tocsins after you have been there a month. Kate and I are going out to California for our wedding trip. I am tempted to stop over on our way back and visit Red Hill just to see the havoc you have wrought in the M. E., Presbyterian and Baptist fortifications."

"Ah! That's the only sensible thing you've said this morning. You're specially invited right now. I'll ask Rose to make one of your favourite three−story apple pies. And I'll take pleasure in introducing you to the fair daughter of the senior deacon whom you mentioned so flippantly a minute ago."

"Accepted. Get your best room ready. We'll wire you from Los Angeles. By the way, what railroad is Red Hill on?"

"On the main line of the Santa Fe."

"Then we can find it, all right. Be down to meet us, so we won't get lost in the population."

Lennox went back to his table and the two friends lapsed into the silence which perfect friends so happily understand. We will break that silence long enough to tell you a little about them.

Roy Lennox was that rara avis, a rich theologue. His father was a retired business man, living in New York, and Roy, after a college course at Yale, had chosen the ministry for his life work and gone on to Union Seminary.

Instead of living at home, he had preferred to be at the Seminary buildings, and there had met Howard Chase, who had entered the seminary the same year. They had gone in as roommates and during the three years' course had grown up one of those deep, lifelong attachments that are the glory of young men.

Roy Lennox had chosen the ministry. He had no liking for a business career which was a great disappointment to his father, who had never known anything else. He did not care for medicine, law, journalism, art, music, or science. His father's means were so ample and his father so indulgent towards him that he had never learned a trade or distinguished himself in college or anywhere else for anything in particular. He had taken the Seminary course in a perfunctory way, occasionally illuminated with exceptional spurts of enthusiasm pumped into him by his chum, but he was near the end of the course, as he himself had said, with no expectation of a call to any church that cared for him enough to ask him to be its pastor. He was going to marry, immediately after graduating, a young woman he had known ever since he was a boy, the daughter of one of his father's partners, a young woman born to luxury, but with more positive and clear cut definitions of life in general than Lennox himself ever had known, who if he had defined himself would have said:

"I am a young man of good habits, respectable parentage and an assured income which I have never earned, a lover of rather expensive and numerous things, willing to be the minister of any fairly well−to−do church where

things are not too strenuous, in which I will do the regular work of a minister with no particular passion, but with perfect propriety, my wife gracing all necessary occasions with good looks, fine taste in dress and ability to preside at the necessary meetings and do the social deeds that go with her position. In other words, I am a harmless individual if I once break into the pastorate, and I have only one really great passion, and that is my admiration for and faith in my roommate and classmate, Howard Chase. He is a real minister, and I will do anything in my power, if he will let me, to back up any plans he has to work out for the reform of the world and the general amelioration of mankind."

In speaking thus of his classmate, Lennox unconsciously revealed the noblest trait he himself possessed. For the enthusiasm he acknowledged, he himself never felt for his own calling, so far as he was called, he did have for Howard Chase, whom he exalted into a position of almost semi−divinity worthy of more than deepest respect, rising at times into a feeling bordering on real worship.

It was the eternal story of attraction of opposites.

Howard Chase had every quality that Roy Lennox lacked. He was called to the ministry with a divine call that was absolutely unmistakable. It was a trumpet call to action, clear, ringing, insistent. It sounded in accents that were staccato, "woe is me if I preach not—−" He never had a doubt as to the miraculous superhuman eternal person of Jesus Christ and the facts of his early story, and their application to daily life. He was ready to go anywhere and preach to anybody. The matter of salary was so minute an item that he never thought to mention it to Lennox when he received his first letter from the Kansas Superintendent, and actually had to refer to previous letters before he could recall the exact amount.

In physical person, Chase was a perfect animal, an athlete of renown in his own college where he had broken the record for the running broad jump, the 440−yard dash, the hurdles, the hammer throw and the quickest tennis player. He was always in training, lithe as a panther, with a profile like Antinous, or, better, like Apollo Belvidere.

With all this physical endowment he carried a finely strung spiritual sensitiveness, so keen and delicate, it seemed at times all feminine. And then, without any warning right across that delicate harp of prophet insight and vision would sweep a hand so primitive, so masculine, with almost coarse and egotistic assumption of power that all the finer things seemed to snap and go at ragged ends, and Lennox many a time gasped at the sight and wondered if his ideal of Chase was destroyed. But it never was, and the growing conviction of Lennox after three years intimate acquaintance only deepened his faith in Howard Chase as an absolutely true, pure, wonderfully endowed soul, something cleaved off of Divine beginnings, but never for one moment renouncing its earth born and earth limited birth.

Chase and Lennox were also at opposite ends of the economic scale. Lennox had money and spent it freely. Chase counted every nickel and performed miracles of economy with his laundry, board, and books. Once, after only a few weeks of first acquaintance, Lennox offered to loan Chase a few dollars. He never made such an offer again. Something in Chase's refusal scared him so that when he found himself alone he felt of himself as if Chase had struck him somewhere. Chase earned money by giving athletic lessons in a Y. M. C. A. gymnasium down town. Once Lennox went with him to a night exhibition in which Chase did the giant swing, and in a boxing contest knocked a Y. M. C. A. member up against a parallel bar standard so hard that he fell down and fainted away.

Chase was kneeling over him in a flash, doing the first right thing, and when the young fellow came to and smiled faintly, Lennox heard Chase say: "I was an ass to hit you so hard." And the reply came faintly and Chase's familiar grin responded to it: "First time I was ever kicked by a mule."

The vivid impression of the evening that Lennox carried away was the impression of , *not expended power, a power that leaped and bounded uphill with leopard strides, relentless when it struck, but just as pitiful and sacrificial when the victim fell as if nothing would atone for the suffering but life itself.*

A word about Chase's family life.

It had been nothing short of a succession of tragedies, beginning with the sudden death of his mother, when he was a child, succeeded by the crippling of an older brother through a fall, and his later death. Then came one of the saddest strokes of all to the family, when the young man to whom his sister, Rose, was engaged committed a business crime and was sentenced to a five−year term in the penitentiary.

The shock of it nearly unbalanced the girl's reason, and under the fiery branding of it she grew old, and, at one time, Howard was afraid she would become bitter and even lose her Christian faith. But they were both spared

that trouble, and Rose had finally accepted her experience, as her brother had prayed she might, and turned her strong affectionate impulse towards the care of her father, who had gradually given way in health under this succession of troubles, and who had died only a few weeks before this history begins, leaving Howard and his sister the only survivors of a family that had once seemed to promise every hope of a long and happy history.

Roy Lennox came over again to his roommate's table. Howard had just finished a letter. He held it up as Lennox looked at him questioningly.

"Yes, it's done. I've written the Superintendent that I'll accept the call to Red Hill and begin work there in May, right after the general conference."

Lennox looked at him wistfully.

"I wish I had a field of some sort. Do you suppose they could keep two men busy? I'd be willing to go out as your assistant and work for nothing. Kate and I could help you undermine the M. E., Presbyterian and Baptist strongholds. I am not much of an underminer myself, but Kate is an expert. You can see what she has done to me."

"Roy, if the smallest church out west hasn't got enough for two men to do it hasn't got enough for one. That's one of my hobbies, you know. But you're mistaken if you think I'm going to undermine any one. I'm going to build up."

"But how can you build up without undermining? If there are only seven hundred souls in Red Hill divided among four churches, I don't understand how you can make your church stronger without making theirs weaker. Unless you draw your support from Kansas City or Topeka."

"Of course, I—−" Howard began, and then stopped. His characteristic grin faded out. The lines of his mouth hardened into straighter meaning. His great eyes seemed to fill with black pigment that flowed over the surface like a colour actually applied by some force behind the screen.

"Roy, I'm going out to Red Hill to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I'm going to get all the souls I can to preach to and work for. That is going to be my main business. If in doing it anything happens to the other religious organisations, I shall not feel responsible. Let them look after themselves. My programme is as clear as noon day sun."

"I know it is," said Lennox, for the first time that morning letting his real feeling for Chase appear.

"And when I said I wished I could be your assistant I wasn't talking lightly. I would count it the greatest thing in my life if I could be with you, and you know it."

"Of course I do." Howard got up and leaned over his table, putting his hands on Roy's shoulders. "And I don't know any one I would rather have. I've prayed every day for a year that the Lord would bless you by taking your money away. If you and Kate had to go into some needy missionary field and work for about nothing and board yourselves, it would be the making of you both. But even as it is, if I can persuade the trustees at Red Hill to take you on my recommendation—−"

The old grin had come back and Roy understood what it meant. He smiled, put his hand on Howard's shoulder, and the two stood that way a moment. Then Howard sat down again and said cheerfully:

"We can look over the field when you and Kate make that visit. Stranger things have happened. This is not all fiction. At any rate, you know well enough what these three years have meant to me."

"I don't know that I do," was Lennox's reply. "I surely don't know what they have meant to me and won't know for a long time. If I ever amount to anything in the ministry it will be your fault. Can't you throw your mantle or something over me before you ascend Red Hill?"

"You will have the Baptism of the Spirit some day, Roy. But not through money or easy chairs or culture. I don't know how you will get it. I know it won't be anything of mine. Something far higher up."

Then silence came between them−−a silence that Lennox filled in his own heart with something like the persuasive voices of abundant life. And that was the most affectionate silence the friends knew during the weeks that followed including the graduation week, the marriage of Lennox and the farewells as the young men separated.

A considerable part of Red Hill was down at the station the day Howard Chase and his sister arrived.

Deacon Burton, who had corresponded with Howard through the Superintendent, George Clark, the local editor, Bruce Carpenter, the High School principal, were the first to greet them and then introduce them to others.

Mrs. Burton, a woman of kindly bearing and attractive personality, invited Howard and Rose up to her house

for the evening meal.

"I knew you would be tired with the long journey, but Mr. Burton and I thought you would not object to a meal with us, seeing it is so near evening, and then you can go right over to the parsonage as soon as you like. It's only one block."

Rose accepted for her brother and herself, while trunks and bundles were being secured and the little company moved away from the station, followed by a good many curious gazes. As Howard was giving his trunk checks to the local Expressman, he heard him say to the station Agent:

"Well, he's a wide awake looking young fellow. Bet he was born in Kansas. New York never raised him."

Howard turned to the man and grinned as he held out his hand.

"That's a prophecy come true. I'll explain it to you some time. Introduce me to the station Agent, won't you? And he'll introduce me to you."

Both men laughed at something in Howard's manner, and as he gripped their hands, he had them won to him in that immeasurable moment.

"Going to hear him preach next Sunday," said the Agent.

"Same here," said the Expressman.

Deacon Burton offered a word of apology as he walked up the street by Howard.

"I would have met you with the auto, but my daughter is using it this afternoon for a high school function. She is chaperoning the senior class at their annual gathering over at Maple Grove. But it's only a short distance to our house, and you don't look like an invalid."

"And I'm not one either. And if I was, the air out here is good enough to raise the dead. Your city hospital isn't crowded, is it?"

"I don't believe there's a dozen sick people in Red Hill," said Deacon Burton, with a pleased look. "We have two good doctors and they're always praying for an epidemic."

"And did you ever see anything like the view, Rose?"

Howard turned to his sister and Mrs. Burton, who were behind.

They had crossed over the one business street and gone one block through an avenue shaded with great elms and soft maples. Looking up the street parallel with the business street, there opened into view a rising swell of the prairie with what looked like a brown scar down one side, not a disfiguring brand, but rather a distinguishing mark in the landscape.

Beyond this rising mound, off in the soft afternoon sunshine that fairly flooded the prairie expanse, stretched the broad reaches of varied shades of spring colour dotted with rich farm land, wooden squares, showing through the young foliage comfortable farm houses and surrounding buildings, while herds of cattle streamed out over the prairie pastures, and wheat and alfalfa spread great stretches like velvet carpet between the different quarter sections, and earth's redundant life flowed into that street of Red Hill in a flood of richness that Chase and his sister had never known before.

"I never saw anything like it!" Rose exclaimed with delight.

"And that's Red Hill, I suppose," said Howard, waiving his hand out towards the mound with the scar.

"Yes," said Deacon Burton. "After a rain it changes colour. You can ask Professor Carpenter for the geological reason. We can leave your things in the parsonage as we go by, if you like. Save carrying them up to the house."

The parsonage was a neat, comfortable seven−room house, and Rose noted with woman's eye the evident preparation made by the church people. There were fresh prairie flowers in the sitting−room, and on the dining−room table a large vase of double lilac.

"Agnes took them from our bushes this morning. They were late in coming out. I hope the scent of them is not too strong," Mrs. Burton said to Rose, who was looking with approval over the simple, but comfortable, room furnishings.

"Our favourite flower," Howard answered, as he bent over to inhale a deep breath, and then, as he drew back, said, with his gravest manner:

"Did you say Agnes? She is your daughter? A teacher in the High School?"

"Yes." They were moving out of the house and the deacon had turned to ask Howard if he cared to look into the church as they went by.

"By all means. Let's see it. I want to get acquainted with my surroundings. The sooner the better."

They went in and Howard Chase paused at the end of the aisle and looked over the room where he was going to experience some of the strangest and most tragic events of his life.

It was a pleasant room, with a Sunday School annex on one side, which could open into the main audience. Capable of seating, the deacon said, two hundred and fifty people when it was all thrown together.

There was a plain pulpit on a platform only three steps above the pews. And an organ, with seats behind it, for eight people on one side of the pulpit and on the same platform.

The room had been freshly painted and papered and Howard noted with pleasure that the hymn books were new and the general appearance of the room spoke of care and pride in its keeping.

"We think our Church is the best building in town," said Deacon Burton. "The Ladies' Society have recently made some improvements. Mrs. Burton is president this year. She is responsible for the paint and paper."

"I got them both out of Mr. Burton's store," Mrs. Burton laughed. "At cost. I never knew before what profit he makes."

"I like the looks of this room," said Howard, with quiet enthusiasm. "I believe I can preach in here Do you have an organised choir?"

"Indeed we do!" Mrs. Burton spoke eagerly. "Agnes plays, and we have a double quartette of young people. You'll hear them on Sunday. They've been practising for a month getting ready for your arrival."

Rose laughed.

"Howard doesn't know one note from another. But he does know a discord when it's loud enough, and he can see it if it is visible in the choir."

"You won't see any, Mr. Chase. The young people are very eager to please you. I'm only afraid they may be too eager. But we have some fine young people."

They went out of the church and walked one block farther to the Burtons'.

"Shall we wait for Agnes?" Deacon Burton asked his wife, as she waited for the minister and his sister to wash off the stains of travel before going in to supper.

"No. She said she did not know when she would get back."

So Howard and Rose sat down to a bountiful meal with the deacon and his wife, and Howard Chase did not see Agnes Burton until he saw her Sunday morning seated at the little organ on the pulpit platform only a few feet away. And that first sight of her changed the current of his whole life. It had so far been unmoved by the woman. The coming of Agnes Burton into Howard Chase's life was an event so far reaching in its consequences, so deep in its influence that no measure can be made of it.

He had three days to prepare for the first Sunday in Red Hill. He spent them largely in helping Rose to get settled in their new home. There was not a great deal to do. The thoughtfulness of the Ladies' Society, headed by Mrs. Burton, had anticipated most of the needs of a well−furnished home.

During these three days Howard met the other ministers of Red Hill.

Rev. Alfred Noyes, of the Methodist church, met him in the post office and introduced himself. He was an elderly man, hearty of manner and gave Howard the first impression of rather positive assertion of ecclesiastical dignity, but altogether friendly and cordial.

Rev. George Harris, the Presbyterian minister, called on him Friday afternoon. He was a slim young man, only two years out of the Seminary, with a rather diffident, but pleasant, manner. Howard, with his overplus of vitality, sat looking at him all through his call, going over the possibility in the future of giving his Brother boxing lessons and straightening up the scholarly curve in his shoulders.

Rev. Henry Gray, of the Baptist Church, was a type entirely new to Chase., Deacon Burton introduced him to Howard as Howard had stepped into the deacon's store to make some inquiries about the church.

"Meet Brother Gray, of the Baptist Church, Mr. Chase, our new minister," Deacon Burton had said, and then had turned to a customer.

Gray shook hands and looked Howard over sharply.

"Glad to meet, you, Brother Chase. Hope you'll have a successful pastorate here. But the field is somewhat crowded."

"Who does most of it?" Howard said, with his customary grin.

The other man seemed all taken back at first. Then he laughed shortly and answered:

"Well, we all do, I guess. We have to in order to live at all. You'll probably get a good part of our congregations next Sunday. That's generally the case when a new man comes."

"How often does a new man come?"

"Well, I'm the oldest resident minister and I've been here seven years. The other churches have all changed pastors several times since I came."

There was rather an awkward pause.

"Is this a church−going community?" Howard asked, studying Brother Gray meanwhile.

"No. This town is given over to all sorts of organisations. We have to fight for our lives with everything you can imagine. We have a moving−picture show that keeps the people away from prayer meeting, and dancing and whist parties have killed the spiritual life of the people. They have no spiritual hunger. They are given up to amusement and moneymaking and gossip. It's the most gossippy town in the state, Brother Chase."

"Looks like a good town for a preacher to work in," said Howard. "Full of sinners. I'm glad I came."

Brother Gray stared and then laughed his short staccato laugh again.

"O you'll have plenty to do that way. And a new broom−−you know. But people don't go to church here. After a few weeks, when they get used to you, you'll be preaching to empty pews like the rest of us."

"Not on your life I won't!" Howard exclaimed, with so much emphasis that Brother Gray started back and his face grew red. "If you think I have come here to preach to empty pews you have another guess coming."

Gray looked at him more closely, and a new look came into his face.

"You'll forgive me, my young Brother, won't you, for speaking as I did about the people. But I get discouraged at times and can't help talking out. And the people do appear so indifferent and so lacking in spiritual response. I don't want to discourage you. Go ahead! If you can get a hearing I hope you will."

Howard detected a hint of a tear in the man's eye and he said to him:

"Perhaps I'm going to take to Brother Gray after all."

He went out of the store and back to his little study in the parsonage, meditating on the things Brother Gray had said and his way of saying them.

And many times, shutting. himself into that little room, and last of all, late on the Saturday night, he prayed, on his knees, for the power of the Spirit in his Sunday services, as he should face his first Red Hill congregation.

It was somewhat different from his mental picture of it. Somehow Red Hill, in the three days that had elapsed since Howard's arrival, seemed to be unusually attracted to the new young preacher of the Congregational Church, and when Howard began the service on that memorable Sunday morning, he faced a real crowd, the biggest crowd, Deacon Burton proudly said at dinner, that ever went to church in Red Hill.

"Did you notice the Baptist and M. E. and Presbyterian folks this morning?" he had said exultantly to his wife and daughter as they eagerly discussed the service. "I saw at least forty from Gray's membership and thirty from the M. E., and more than a score from Harris'. I don't believe they had more than a handful at all their churches."

As a matter of fact, by actual count, as Red Hill knew before the day was over, less than one hundred and twenty−five people all told were in attendance at the three other churches.

The little annex was open and every chair occupied. One row of extra chairs was put down the main aisle. Chairs were brought over from the parsonage and put in the front part of the little vestibule. And a crowd of men and boys stood up along the walls, and at Howard's suggestion, before he went forward to the platform, some of the older boys were asked to sit on the platform itself, a thing unheard of in the history of the church.

As he went up to the pulpit, he knew that Red Hill collectively was taking critical account of him, of his bearing, his clothes, his general appearance. But as he put his foot on the first step, there was not a tremour in his heart, not a nervous thrill, nothing but a great hunger to get at his message to the people. It was not egotism, it was simply the hunger to preach, the longing of the prophet to say "thus saith the Lord."

He had taken his seat and the girl at the organ had begun playing when he noticed on the inner side of the pulpit, lying close up against the raised part that held the big Bible, a spray of double lilac blossoms. It had evidently been placed there. The sight of them swept his memory back to Union Seminary and Roy Lennox's whimsical statement "flowers will adorn your pulpit"−−and at the thought of it he caught himself grinning and then stopped−−as he turned his head and saw, for the first time, the girl at the organ, Agnes Burton.

She had been away with a friend and had not returned home until late Saturday, and so he had not met her on his visit to the deacon's where he had gone three or four times to consult about church matters.

She seemed at first wholly intent on her music, but as Howard turned in that brief moment her face seemed to convey to him a knowledge of his look that for one second struck him almost like a blow.

Could such a face−−could it be possible the flowers were it was a thought that had less than lightning's vision−−and it was gone. He had arisen, they were singing the Doxology, he was being swept along in the fervour of the service and naught else was of value Woman? She might have her place but not now−−all the world contained for the next hour only one matter of supreme importance, and he was carried away with it.

He stood up when the sermon was reached, his whole splendid animal beauty intensified by his fiery consecration, and absorbing purpose to get at the real lives before him. The people of Red Hill had never seen anything like it. His text was "In the Unity of the Spirit," and a plea for that oneness of personal and community life that should transform the individual and the town into a new life in Christ Jesus his Lord.

The girl at the organ sat with clasped hands and burning cheeks, and eyes that never drooped but once, and that was when he turned to include the young people in the choir with a passionate plea, the people in the pews leaned forward as one person, the men in the back part of the vestibule stood with hands on one another's shoulders, the rich beauty of the May splendour of the spring prairie floated into the open windows and a quiet hush like that one feels at a Benediction when the Spirit has filled the house fell on all hearts, as that notable ministry of Howard Chase began at Red Hill.

CHAPTER II

When Monday morning dawned over Red Hill one theme of conversation mingled with the coffee and toast around the breakfast tables and up and down the one business street and the new minister furnished the topic.

Down at the Santa Fe Station the Agent pulled the baggage truck up to the end of the platform where the mail car of No. 12 stopped.

The Expressman was there leaning against the back of his wagon.

"That was some preaching yesterday, no?" said the Agent as he hooked up the handle of the truck.

"It sure was," said the Expressman. "I come pretty near going in the evening. I did get up to the door but I couldn't get in."

"If you don't look out you'll get to be a regular church goer," said the Agent as he started up the platform.

"I shouldn't wonder. Going next Sunday if I can get in."

The Agent stopped, looked back at the Expressman and grinned.

"Why don't you ask him for a seat on the platform?"

"And I bet he'd give me one if I did," said the Expressman, standing a little straighter up against his wagon.

"I'm sure he would," replied the Agent. "He'd give you his own high−backed chair."

Up on the street Deacon Burton was talking with George Clark, editor of the Red Hill *, the county paper.*

"What do you think of our new minister, George? Didn't he do us proud, yesterday?"

"Yes−−" Clark replied, a little cautiously. "But do you think he can keep it up? Struck me he started off on high gear with the muffler wide open. Do you think he can stand the pace?"

"That isn't the question. Do you think *can stand it? We've never had any one like him before. Why, he just naturally got a hold of me before he got both feet off the train the other day."*

"He's a likely young fellow all right," Clark assented. "Wonder what the other preachers think of him."

"And wonder what he thinks of them," Deacon Burton grinned.

"I don't believe he gives a rap about them. He acts to me as if there weren't any other preachers in Red Hill but just himself."

"How would you have him act?" Deacon Burton asked a little sharply.

Clark stared and then laughed.

"Of course I wouldn't have him act any other way. But we can't expect to keep a young fellow like that in Red Hill. He's cut out for a metropolitan pulpit. He won't stay here long."

"I don't suppose he will." Deacon Burton said it with a note of reluctance. "He's too rich for our blood. But the church is bound to grow while he is here. Why, do you know there were men in church last night I never saw inside of any church, and thought I never would see there until they were in their coffins."

Clark picked up the bundle he had bought and started to go out.

"He sure has 'em going. He was around to see me early this morning to get out some special dodgers for Sunday evening meetings. He isn't going to give you saints any ease in Zion."

"Nor you sinners any in the other place," retorted Deacon Burton, who knew Clark well enough to remonstrate with him nearly every time he saw him, about his not being a church member.

George Clark was one of a score of business men in Red Hill who were rated "as good as church members" but never professed Christianity in a personal way and had never joined a church. He attended with greater regularity than most of the members, contributed generously to the support of the church regardless of the preacher, and was counted a regular "supporter" of the church. His daughter Inez, with whose history we are more specially concerned, sang in the young people's chorus and helped her father get out the paper, setting type, reading copy, editing the letters from county correspondents and serving as general utility help in the office. She had graduated from the High School two years before the eventful Sunday that marked the advent of the new Congregational minister and had won an enviable reputation with the other girls for amateur dramatics. When the class at its annual "Confession" had predicted their own life histories, Inez had said with a frankness that was so free from any attempt at pretense that it voiced her deepest ambitions.

"Well, people, I am going to be a movie actress. They say some of them get as much as eight hundred dollars

a week. And I am willing to do any stunts they ask. And I've been practising one or two."

There she stopped provokingly, while the other girls and the four boys who belonged to the class dared her to tell what the stunts were. But Inez shook her head and no appeals could make her reveal her secret.

But as she sat there on the high school steps where the class always held its "Confession" the girl saw again in retrospect the thing she had dared, and in her heart she knew it was part shame and part pride that kept her silent. No one should ever know, not even her father.

This is what she saw again as she sat there grave and wide eyed in the face of the noisy chatter on the high school steps.

No. 9 of the Santa Fe came roaring through Red Hill at 5:27 A. M. First intimation of it was a faint hum out back of Red Hill as the engine opened up on the long curve that swung around the slope and then, if the wind was north−west, suddenly the hum would swell into the crash of the drivers on the rails and the whole length of the train would strike up its diapason as it swung down the grade through the bridge over the creek and then fling itself past the little station with a crescendo of mingling noises, wheel and rail and switch and empty station and swaying coaches all joining in together with a grand burst of power that always thrilled Inez as she often lay awake to hear No. 9 go swinging through the little sleeping town, its roar dying out as it began, like the Turkish patrol, and the prairie stretches would fall back again into the slumber from which No. 9 had rudely awakened them. Ever since she was a little girl, No. 9 due at 5:27 A. M. had been an awesome thing, alive and with a great beating heart, and when its long white eye first showed around the curve of Red Hill she used to shrink back with fear as she lay awake looking out of the little window at the monster approaching the empty little station with leaping strides as if to tear it to pieces as it thundered past.

Somewhere she had read in a magazine story a bit of rolling verse called "The Rime of the Car Wheel," and having a quick and retentive memory she had learned it and with a certain fascination nearly every time she heard the first hum of No. 9 she found herself going over the rhyme until it became to her almost like a thunderous chanty breathed out by the very train itself, or by the wheel under the train. And this is what the wheel said to Inez as she lay there listening:

Once I lay deep in the darkness, silent, profound; Part of the forces primeval, under the ground. Part of its matter for ages on ages I lay, Far from the fever of earth and the sunlight of day.

Then I was torn from my bed by the claw of man's greed, Hurled from my rest to supply what he calls daily need; Crushed under rollers and thrust in the maddening fire, And the hammers of fate fell upon me to work their desire.

Then the pressure of hydraulic forces encompassed me round, Whirled and revolved me, with din and with deafening sound; Bent and encircled to fashion the intricate plan, Heated and beaten and shaped for the service of man.

Waking from dreams of my torture, I rolled on the steel Stretching on endlessly mile upon mile like a reel, Changing beneath me with ring and with resonance keen, While the smoke and the cinders, the dust and the sparks, flew between.

Fashioned I was to be servant of powers above, Fashioned to follow the track of the steel as I strove, Fashioned to fill up my place in the intricate plan, Fashioned to whirl, day and night, in the service of man.

Thus, I learned why I was beaten and smitten and torn Out of the primeval forces wherein I was born; Bearing the weight of the burden upon my hard heart, Giving to man's energizing my infinite part.

Over the bridges I thunder, and over the lea, In through the tunnels and mountains and down by the sea Bearing the precious life over the river's wide span, Rolling and ringing and shaped for the service of man.

Faithful I serve, as I carry the people above, Bearing the lover to lover and love to its love, Bringing the message that colours the cheek or makes pale, Whirling on those who shall meet to laugh or to wail.

Daylight or dark is the same to my purpose or speed−− Sunshine or storm giveth me, in my whirling, small heed; Onward I roll as a part of the infinite plan, Hammered and beaten and shaped for the service of man.

But one morning a few days before graduation she had helped her father off with an early breakfast on account of some rush county printing, and after he was gone and she had begun to do up the dishes, suddenly the thought of No. 9 due in half an hour seemed to speak to her with the rhyme of the car wheel pounding up and down in her temples, and then with a flash came her resolve to try a thing that one of the moving pictures given by the show−place in town had suggested and, after standing a moment by the kitchen sink, she finished wiping

the few dishes, put them back in the cupboard, ran up into her room, caught up a light scarf, throwing it around her head as she came out of the house, paused a moment on the porch, then closed the door gently and ran down towards the track only two blocks away.

A few lights were showing here and there, but no one was on the street and as she came to the track there was only the two switch lights, one up and one down, burning, showing the green and red, the semaphore set both arms down for clear, and the black outline of the steel bridge against the white breadth of the hill, for it was a winter morning when No. 9 became a vivid part of the girl's life history.

She had seen in a film picturing a telephone girl's heroism, an operator running out of a station during the bursting of a dam and the girl had run at the risk of her life to warn an approaching train of the danger, crossing a bridge that was going out under the impact of a great rush of freshet logs pounding against the frail supports of the bridge. Inez pictured it all again as she stood there, her eyes on the steel bridge only two hundred feet away−−she could see the darting figure of the girl leaping over the timbers as they flew up, and the bridge crumbled under the torrent, but she escaped in some miraculous fashion and reached the opposite bank just as the entire structure went down the muddy gulf of wreckage, and she ran on facing the oncoming train, stopping it on the very brink of death.

"If course it was all made up, but the danger was really all there," Inez said, as she sat looking at the film, every pulse beating with strange desire to do something as heroic.

And now, out of her exaggerated romance, of her own ambition she was out there in the silent morning to test her own heart and dare to do what she dreamed she might some time have to do−−she would wait until No. 9 was just showing on the inward curve of the hill and race across the bridge in time to−−she scarcely gave herself a thought of how the distance should be measured, but she had seen No. 9 cross the space between the curve and the creek so often that she seemed to know, without knowing why, just how much time she ought to allow herself before entering the end of the bridge.

Once on the bridge there could be no turning back and there was very little space on the sides−−she had been through it more than once when the little creek was bank high with a great thunder storm and there was no danger of trains−−but now she was seeking danger for its own sake for the thrill of it, for the novelty, life was so tame in Red Hill, so little of any real interest ever happened to her−−Yes, she said to herself, she would enjoy all the fulness of life she wanted−−there! now! the headlight was just showing around the curve and she ran up the middle of the track and into the bridge which was in deep shadow as the curve on the hill extended nearly to the bridge entrance.

She recalled, sitting there on the High School steps, just how she touched every other tie as she ran, and the life−time of horror she felt in the one second when she slipped and fell within ten feet of the other end of the bridge and said to herself, "It is all over." And the next second she was on her feet again, feeling the hot breath of the monster as it came charging into the opening, and she was outside, half way down the bank up to her ankles in the sand and cinders sobbing hysterically and yet with a curious feeling of pride over her escape and a half formed promise to try it again, such as one feels, they say, who has charged up a hill in battle and escaped unhurt among the bullets that have killed half the regiment.

And as she climbed painfully back up to the rails she felt for her scarf. It was gone. She went down the embankment a little ways but could not find it, and, going on through the bridge again, she searched along the ties at the spot where she fell, but no scarf was there and she said to herself, "It must have slipped between the ties and gone down into the creek."

Going on with her retrospect as she sat there on the High School steps she recalled her surprise and fear lest she should be found out, when, two days later, an item came into her father's office from one of the paper's contributors living in the county seat ten miles from Red Hill.

"When Tom Radcliff, engineer on No. 9, got down at Underhill to−day to oil old Abe he found on his pilot, caught on a splinter, a nice scarf. The lady it belonged to was not on the pilot and Tom is wondering at what station she got off. Bill Granger, the fireman, says he thought he saw something like a ghost on the bridge at Ross Creek Crossing, Red Hill, last Tuesday, but Bill has always been superstitious and this is not the first ghost he has seen this year. No one claimed the scarf, so Tom took it home to his wife. It is not every day, he says, that the pilot picks up a good article of clothing without the owner."

Inez ran the item into the paper and her father, reading it, commented on it briefly.

"Did I ever tell you, Inez, your mother, when she was a girl, rode on the pilot of No. 9 from Fairoaks to Aldrich on the Irvington Division of the Santa Fe? She did it on a challenge from her brother, and nearly lost her life. She was very reckless sometimes, your mother was."

Inez's mother had been dead fifteen years and Inez, who was seventeen when she graduated, could not recall her. All she knew was her father idolised the daughter and seldom spoke of the mother. But for all his idolising he did not understand his daughter and Inez seldom confided any real life feeling to him. The last thing George Clark could picture was the sight of Inez racing up the Santa Fe track to beat No. 9 at the end of the Creek bridge. He knew she was fond of the movies and always asking to go and going without asking, but the girl's real passion for novelty and adventure, and her revolt at the humdrum office life in the dull little town was entirely unknown to him, and the girl had no confidant, either man or woman.

And there was another secret Inez was keeping from her father. It was so new, it had leaped into her heart so quickly, she was so astonishingly childish about it that she was afraid−−she might some time tell her father about No. 9, that was an old secret, but new secrets are not to be lightly related to any one. And this had to do with the new minister.

"After all," Inez said to herself, as the Monday morning after Howard's first service she sat in the office picking up type for a stupid letter from an ignorant county contributor who had to be noticed, "after all, I am not to blame if I try to make life interesting in this poky town. Nothing ever happens here unless you make it yourself. And the new minister is the most interesting person I have ever seen or heard. If I should—−"

She was sitting at the case, a type between her fingers, when Howard Chase came in. It was very early, and Inez looked around to see where her father was and then remembered he had said he was going up to the house to get some copy he had left in another coat, but would be right back.

Howard came up near the case and said with his usual cheerful abruptness:

"It's Miss Clark, isn't it? I meant to have met all my choir singers yesterday, but there was such a crowd I couldn't meet them all."

"Yes," said Inez. "I—−"

Howard went on with careless disregard of conversation, that was part of his quickness of mental and physical motion and not an intentional rudeness.

"I know it's pretty early, but I wanted to get out some dodgers as soon as possible. But I wanted to talk with your father about them, and see that the printing was going on in a certain way."

"I think father will be back soon," said Inez. "He said he would be right back. Perhaps if you are in a hurry I can tell you what you want."

Howard looked surprised and Inez anticipated his question by saying, "I think I can set up the copy as you want it. I do most of the job work here."

"No. Do you?" Howard had been thinking of her as just a young girl. She seemed to resent his unspoken thought of her and said quickly:

"If you don't believe I can do it let me see the copy, and tell me what you want."

Howard laughed in his boyish way, and came up nearer the case.

"I didn't know you did the actual work yourself. Here's what I want." He spread out his "copy" on top of the case and went over it rapidly. "I want this all double leaded and in ten point. Put the head line `Do You Go to Church?' right in the centre of the page, fourteen point, not at the top, and these sentences on each end up and down instead of across. And I wonder if your father has a cut of the church building anywhere?"

"I don't know of any, Mr. Chase. But why are you having these dodgers printed?"

As Inez asked it, the question sounded bold, and yet in her heart she was simply talking to keep him in the office as long as she could, in her eagerness to make his visit a part of her new adventure in life.

Howard looked at her in surprise, as if the question were one he would not expect from a girl like Inez. And this time he noted the fact that she was older than his first thought of her, and there was a look there that made him instantly and with intuitive quickness change his own attitude, which had been that of careless friendliness with one of his own flock−−but his absolutely clean, untarnished young manhood had never once been at fault in its sense of peril wherever woman was concerned, and he had never yielded in the smallest degree to the power he must have known that he possessed.

He moved back from the case just a little and in reply to Inez's question he said with a quiet gravity which had

an instant effect on her, "Why shouldn't I get them printed?"

"I don't see what is the use of inviting people to come to church when the church won't hold those who do come."

Howard laughed. It was so loud and almost boisterous that Inez was startled and confused.

"But I'm not getting out the dodgers for those who come. Only for those who don't. And I'm sure there must be a lot of people in Red Hill who have never been. Besides, I'm afraid those who have begun to come won't keep it up unless I do something to remind them. The dodgers are just to help 'em get the habit."

"O," said Inez. She couldn't think of anything else to say. And just then her father came in and Howard turned instantly with his copy to him.

"I know it's early, Mr. Clark, but I want to get this printing out to−day if possible, and I've just been talking with your daughter about it. You see I want something attractive for my boys to hand out."

Clark looked over the copy, and after a few suggestions which Howard accepted, he said, with a curious look at the new minister, "Pardon me, Mr. Chase, but I don't quite understand what you want these dodgers for. The church is full already. What will you do with the people you are inviting to come to church, if they come? Where will you seat them?"

Howard laughed, and Inez chimed in, a silvery chime with just a swift look at the minister and then back to her typesetting again.

"I'm going after every person in Red Hill and vicinity. Half these dodgers are going out into the country. I understand the farmers around here have quit going to church. If we can't get folks into the building we'll go outdoors. There is a fine lot of land around the church, and we might as well use it."

Clark could not help giving the new minister a look of admiration.

"All right. Of course I don't object to the printing. It's what I live by. And the outdoor meetings strike me all right. You could build out the front platform a little, put up electric lights around the yard and—−"

"Yes," broke in Howard with cheerful indifference to Clark's unfinished sentence. "Yes! Look here!"

He took the first sheet of paper his fingers could reach and began to draw a sketch in rough outline.

"Here's the front of the church. The platform is almost big enough. We can build it out here about six feet, and add, say five here and seat our chorus right here at the left of the door. Run the electric lights out here, and hitch onto these trees along the side. We have seventy−five chairs in the Sunday School room and we can get as many more from Deacon Burton's undertaking room and build some benches here. We ought to be able to seat two hundred and fifty people in the church grounds. Then we can range the farmers up in the road with their auto mobiles, parking them in two deep, so that one hundred or maybe two hundred can hear−−that is—−" Howard looked up from his sketch including Inez and her father with one of his characteristic grins which came over him when he was absolutely absorbed in his own enthusiasms and the people around him were impersonal, "that is, I mean, of course, the farmers, not the machines. Why, we ought to be able to get a crowd of five hundred people to an outdoor service."

He looked up from his sketch at Clark. Inez had become so interested in Howard's fiery eagerness that she had left her place at the case and was leaning over the composing−stone where Howard's rough sketch lay. Clark was gazing at Howard openmouthed and grave.

"You don't mean to say, Mr. Chase, that you expect to get an audience of farmers numbering two hundred, to go to church service on Sunday night? Why, there aren't twenty farmers in all the county ever came to church in Red Hill. You never can—−"

"That's the reason they ought to come then," broke in Howard. "And there's no reason, come to think of it, why we shouldn't begin with next Sunday. I can build that extension to the platform myself, and have everything all ready. Let me have that copy. I'll put on an invitation to an outdoor service."

He took steps over to the case where Clark had put the copy. But Inez had somehow anticipated him with a swift movement, and their hands touched over the bit of paper. Her face was instantly flooded with colour and she stammered, "Oh! excuse me." Howard never showed by the slightest quiver any embarrassment, but he took the paper over to where Clark was standing and began to write at the bottom of the page:

"Next Sunday evening, if the weather permits, services will be held outdoors. Seats for all. Those who come in automobiles can see and hear in their cars. Service will begin at eight. Good music by the Chorus. The subject of the sermon will be `The Foolish Farmer.'

"There! How's that? That ought to bring the farmers!"

He laughed again, the almost rude, loud laugh that had made Inez shrink back. And then immediately his eyes seemed to gather great depth and his face became stern and his whole attitude put Clark and his daughter wholly out of his thought, and they seemed to feel as they looked at him, that he was removed from them by miles of distance, thinking over his own thoughts in a world of his own, from which he had excluded every one but himself.

"How many copies do you want?" Clark was saying after a moment of complete silence.

"How? How many? O! make it five hundred. And when can I get them?" He had come back into the shop from his abstraction and spoke in his regular straight forward wide−awake manner.

"I can have them ready by to−morrow morning."

"Thank you, Mr. Clark. I'll appreciate that. Goodbye."

He took off his hat as he bowed, turned and went quickly out, stopping the swing of the door in time to prevent its banging.

Clark picked up the copy and carried it over to Inez, saying, "Great fellow, isn't he? He'll make the trustees situp. You can begin on that. See how neat a job you can do, Inez."

The girl did not answer as her father went back to his desk at the other side of the shop. From where she sat she could see the minister as he crossed the street and she watched him as he reached the other side and started to go down the walk.

Then a little thing happened, a small event in any human life, but as the girl watched it from where she sat it burned into her memory like something eternal, and her heart beat quicker and her pulses throbbed with new meaning.

The first door across the street from Clark's printing shop was a milk depot. Just as the minister was passing this door it opened suddenly and a little girl came running out with a bottle of milk. A small dog was lying on a step in front of the door and as the child came out, it rose suddenly and barked.

The child started back and in her fright dropped the bottle. It fell on the sidewalk and broke. The dog at once turned its attention to the spilled milk. Chase was between the child and Inez, but his action filled in the details of the little drama, for the next moment the minister and the child disappeared into the milk depot and a minute later came out, Chase with a new bottle of milk and the child walking by his side holding his hand as if she had known him always and the minister laughing and evidently carrying on a great and important conversation.

Inez went over to the window and watched the two figures, the stalwart, athletic man, and the little girl, until they turned a corner.

And then she went back to her seat at the case and sat there with burning cheeks, eyeing the copy for the minister's "dodger." But before she began work upon it she covered her face with her hands and when she took them away they were wet with hot tears.

Howard Chase had not turned the corner before he had learned the name and residence of his new acquaintance.

"Did you say Wilson?"

"Yes, sir, Lida Wilson. And I live next door to Deacon Burton."

"Miss Wilson, with your permission I will see you safe home with this milk. Are you willing?"

"Yes, sir. I know you. You are the new Congre−−Congre−−gestional minister, aren't you? We are Methodists."

"I won't let that prejudice me, Miss Wilson. I think just as much of you as if you were a Congregestionalist."

The child looked up at him with the deep gravity of six years of experience.

"My mother won't like it to have me break the bottle. I broke one last week."

"I'll tell her how the dog frightened you. Really we should have brought the dog along to show her. My mistake. But the milk wasn't wasted. Really that dog was waiting for you, I believe. It was his only show to get a breakfast, and I don't believe he had a cent in his pocket."

"Mother will pay you for the bottle, Mr.−−Mr.—−"

"Mr. Chase is my name. I should have introduced myself before," Howard managed to shift the bottle under his arm and took off his hat.

The child laughed and tightened her hold on his hand.

"You're funny, Mr. Chase, but I like you."

Howard looked down at her−−O she was a very little girl−−and said very gravely.

"Thank you. Little girls almost always like me. I don't just know why."

"Don't big girls like you, too?"

"O dear, I'm afraid they do, Miss Wilson. But we're getting into deep conversational waters. Good thing we're almost at your residence."

"There's Miss Burton. She's a big girl."

Howard caught sight of Deacon Burton's daughter out in the yard picking roses from a bush near the front porch. And as he came up by the yard she looked up and smiled while Howard stopped to say good−morning.

"What wonderful mornings you have out here, Miss Burton. But I did not know it could be so hot in May. It's just like summer."

"Yes, it's the climate of the prairie. I hope you and your sister are going to like it."

"Oh, we're in love with it already. And Red Hill is full of adventures. I've just had an exciting one with Miss Wilson here."

"Let me have the bottle, please, Mr. Chase, and I'll run in and get the money."

Miss Wilson seized the bottle, holding it very carefully in both hands and ran into the next house adjoining the Burton's. Howard gave Miss Burton a humorous sketch of his morning adventure and then told of his Sunday evening plan.

"I put down on the notice `Good music by the Chorus.' You will see to that, won't you, Miss Burton?"

"Yes. We can sing some of the old hymns like `The Way of the Cross Leads Home' and ask every one to join in the Chorus."

She had gradually come down to the front of the yard by the walk, holding the flowers she had picked against her white dress and Howard had a momentary troubled vision of the lilacs on the edge of the pulpit Sunday morning and was wondering−−when little Miss Wilson came running out.

"Mother hadn't any change and I had to shake it out of my bank. That's why it took so long," the little maid said, as she gravely put the moist pennies into Howard's hand.

"And mother said to thank you for getting the bottle."

"Excuse me, Miss Burton, I expect I ought to complete my adventure by explaining to Miss Wilson's mother how it all happened."

He bowed as he took off his hat with a formal goodbye, and Miss Burton turned to go back into the house. But on the porch she turned again to look at the new minister and Miss Wilson. Lida had hold of his hand again, and Mrs. Wilson had come to the door. The houses were close together and Agnes Burton, lingering on the porch, could hear the neighbour say heartily:

"Thank you, Mr. Chase, for your kindness to Lida. She is a shy little girl, but you made a conquest of her right off."

Howard laughed and very briefly told the story of the dog, the spilled milk and the crying child. He was interrupted by Lida.

"Mother, I wish we were Congregestionalists, instead of Methodists. Then I could go to Mr. Chase's church."

Mrs. Wilson laughed as Howard turned to go back to the main business street.

"I'm afraid you'll break up our church, if you keep on, Mr. Chase. You must come in now, Lida. Say good−bye to Mr. Chase."

"Good−bye and thank you," said Lida, dropping his hand reluctantly.

"Good−bye, Miss Wilson. Happy to have met you." He included in his farewell Mrs. Wilson and Agnes Burton, who still lingered on the deacon's porch.

The Wilsons and Burtons held frequent porch conversations, the houses were so near together and their lawns joining.

"Your new minister is a very attractive young man, Agnes, don't you think?"

"Yes," said Miss Burton, slowly.

"You won't be able to keep him long. Such bright preachers don't stay long in small towns."

"I suppose not," said Miss Burton as she picked the petals off of a rose and let them drop on the porch floor.

"I didn't hear him last Sunday, but I think I'll go in the evening if I can get in."

Miss Burton spoke of the minister's plan for the outdoor services, and Mrs. Wilson seemed greatly interested.

"Your minister is going to get all our folks over to his services, Agnes, if he keeps on. But he'll have to be awful careful. He's an unusually attractive and smart young man and he isn't married. I expect all the young ladies in Red Hill are after him already."

"I don't think Mr. Chase is in any danger." Agnes spoke hastily, seemed about to add another sentence then shut her lips resolutely and went into the house. Mrs. Wilson shook her head as if she knew more than she would tell, as Agnes disappeared.

Howard Chase stopped in to see Deacon Burton as he went up the main street to talk over his plan for evening services.

He found the deacon a little doubtful about the plan on account of the unsettled weather.

"You see, Mr. Chase, I think the idea is fine, but you don't know this prairie country as we do who have lived on it all our lives. We have some most tremendous thunderstorms here in May and June and they generally come up out of the southwest late in the afternoon, very often at seven or eight o'clock. They are terrific. And will always be a part of the prairie country."

"You don't have cyclones here, do you? The eastern papers were always quoting Kansas as the home of the cyclone and the blizzard."

"No," Deacon Burton exploded. "We never did have a cyclone in Red Hill. Last year Georgia headed the list of states in the United States for the largest number of cyclones. It's a slander on Kansas to call it a cyclone state. But−−we do have some great wind and thunder storms at this time of the year. I'm afraid if you start outdoor meetings they will be interrupted by storms."

"But I'm having dodgers printed announcing the meetings to begin next Sunday."

"You are!" Deacon Burton seemed disturbed, then he laughed.

"O go ahead. Have you spoken to any of the other church officers about it?"

"Why no. I never thought of it. I thought the church called me to work the best way I could."

Deacon Burton exploded again.

"It's all right as far as I'm concerned. Go ahead.

But I would advise you to consult with Deacon Allen before you begin stringing your electric lights. He is pretty touchy about being consulted. And by the way how are you going to pay for the platform and the wiring and the incidentals, the printing and so forth?"

"Why, I'm paying for the printing myself. And if the church won't buy the lumber and the wire, I will. I'll do all the work for nothing. Why, it's a part of my job. It's what I came out here for."

Deacon Burton looked at the new minister a moment without a word. Then he threw up his hands and exclaimed:

"You can go through me and get all I have. You've got the drop on me. But I can't answer for Deacon Allen. He will have to be shown. How much do you want for the lumber?"

"I haven't figured it out yet. I'll tell you after dinner. I'll go right over and see Deacon Allen now and be back in a few minutes."

He went out of the store with the swift but noiseless stride peculiar to his physical nature and Deacon Burton chuckled as he turned to a customer as he muttered, "I reckon Clark was right when he said our new minister was not going to give the saints any rest in Zion."

It seemed only a few minutes before Howard was back in the store, calmly saying to Deacon Burton, "It's all right with Deacon Allen. I saw him and he offered to give five dollars towards expenses."

"Have you got the money?"

"No. But I'll get it. Now tell me where to get the lumber and the wire and I'll get busy with the platform, and not trouble you any more to−day."

The deacon gave him the necessary information and as Howard shot out of the store he muttered to himself, "I'd give five dollars to know what the young fellow said to Deacon Allen to get his consent. And if he can get five dollars out of him besides, well, a six foot miracle has come to Red Hill on two feet."

The good deacon was still puzzling over the matter when half an hour later Deacon Allen came in. Deacon Allen kept an implement store and was popularly supposed by Red Hill, which knew everybody's income, to be worth at least fifteen thousand dollars.

"Mr. Chase has just been over to see me about a plan he has for outdoor Sunday evening services. He asked me if I wouldn't come over and counsel with you about it. He said he had already spoken to you."

"Yes. I think it's a great plan if the thunder storms let it alone. And it will be extra expense."

"Yes. I thought of that, and asked him about it. He said if the church couldn't afford it he would pay for it and do the work. That didn't seem just fair so I offered to subscribe five dollars."

"I'll give you ten if you'll tell me, deacon, how the minister got you to do it."

Deacon Allen turned red, evaded Deacon Burton's look, then he turned and faced him directly.

"I tell you, Burton, I don't know myself how he did it."

"Have you paid him the money yet?"

"No. But of course—−"

"Give it to me and, I'll put ten with it. The young fellow ought to be encouraged. And you know, Deacon, we've got money to burn."

"Speak for yourself," said Deacon Allen, a little gruffly. But he pulled out a fat pocket book, extracted from it the dirtiest five it contained and handed it over to Deacon Burton.

Burton chuckled as he took it. "There's so much saved from burning anyhow."

"It'll burn in a big electric light bill all right," said Deacon Allen as he went out of the store. "But after all, I don't mind. We don't get preachers like him in Red Hill every day. He's smart, he is."

Deacon Burton grinned over the incident several times that morning and after dinner he walked around by the church. The lumber was out in the church yard and Howard was in his shirt sleeves sawing and pounding away and whistling as he worked.

"I'll send one of the boys up this afternoon to help," the deacon said. "And here's Deacon Allen's subscription and mine."

He handed Howard three clean five dollar bills−−he had been to the bank to get them−−and Howard with a smile tucked the money into his pocket.

"I think that will about cover the entire expense. I appreciate it. And I won't forget it when I come to preach your funeral sermons."

"What did you say to Deacon Allen? I'd give another five to know."

Howard grinned.

"I haven't time to tell now. Too busy. Why don't you ask *?"*

"I did, and he said he didn't know how you did it."

Howard laid down his hammer and laughed, the rude, boisterous laugh that did not seem to belong to him.

"The deacon never had any fun with his money. Won't it be a good turn for him if we can make him have some before he goes to the land where nothing but character is legal tender?"

As the deacon turned to go away he said, "Oh, I forgot. Mrs. Burton asked me to give your sister and you a special invitation to Sunday dinner."

"Thank you. We'll be glad to come," said Howard as he picked up his hammer and began work again.

He worked with such energy that with the help of two young men from the deacon's store the platform and the wiring were finished by Wednesday night, and some extra benches made. His dodgers had been distributed through the town and out through the county and Clark had a handsome notice in the Friday .

"I believe it will be a go, Rose," Howard had said when Saturday night came and he and his sister had gone over to the church to see if anything more were needed.

He went into the little vestibule and turned on the lights. Everything was all right. Extra seats were in the Sunday School room ready to be carried out, and Howard had secured the services of a number of his boys to act as ushers. Red Hill was talking about the scheme to a household. And the farmers ten miles out were reading his dodgers and many of them planning to go to church who had not gone for years.

Sunday morning dawned hot and still. The morning service was almost a repetition of the first Sunday. Not quite so many out, but a number of new faces. And Howard preached with all his might. He was dripping at the end of the service and had to go over to the parsonage and change his clothes before joining his sister to go over to Deacon Burton's.

A meal at the Burton's was a liberal education in the art of domestic science. Howard who was a hearty eater soon found out that Mrs. Burton and Agnes did all the cooking, and he did not try to conceal his pleasure, but to

the evident disappointment of the Burtons excused himself immediately after the meal in order to complete his plans for the evening.

"I'd like to visit but I can't. Never took a nap Sunday afternoon in my life. There's a number of things I want to look after. Miss Burton, you have the chorus well in hand and I leave that part of the service to you."

"We have a great chorus," Agnes said with eagerness. "Over thirty volunteers and more promised."

The deacon stepped out on the porch as Howard left the house and walked to the end looking out to the southwest.

A grey line was spreading over the sky clearly defined against the blue. There was no breeze stirring. A moist, muggy heat rose up from the dusty road.

"Don't want to discourage you, Chase. But if I know anything about prairie weather we are in for a big storm sometime this afternoon or evening."

Howard laughed. "Why, the sky is clear. No sign of rain."

"Sign enough," said the deacon shortly. The one touchy place about Deacon Burton was his weather prophecy.

Howard went over to the church after the Sunday School session and finding it cooler there than in his little study at the parsonage he stayed there working on his evening sermon, going over his points again and again, now and then walking up and down the aisle and speaking aloud.

He was absorbed in his task so deeply that he came to himself with a start at the sound of a peal of thunder that rolled over the church and into the open windows like a solid thing.

He ran out on the platform. The grey line that Deacon Burton had noticed had swept up over the sky and covered the sun and back under the line was a great green−black cloud covering all the southwest heaven, through the green band intense electric power flashed and a faint breeze stirred the leaves of the boxelder trees out in the church yard.

He took out his watch. It was half past five. He went back into the church and closed the windows. When he came out and shut the door and stood on the platform the green−black cloud had swept up with astonishing quickness and it was getting dark. As he started across the church yard to the parsonage a patter of hail stones fell around him and before he had reached the little porch big drops of rain spattered over the grass. A warm air touched his cheek, and out back of the houses in the next block the trees suddenly bent over and a dull roar came to his ear like the beat of the surf on the old Maine coast where he was born. And for the first time in his life as he ran up the stairs to shut the windows the young minister at Red Hill felt a clutch of something like fear at his heart as the prairie thunderstorm in all its fury came bounding in from its wide prairie stretches and fell with wild roar over parsonage and church, blotting out the sunlight and crashing with all its elemental power over the crouching and terrified town.

CHAPTER III

It was the morning after the Big Storm in Red Hill and the Santa Fe Agent was standing out on the platform of the little station when the Expressman drove up.

"Some storm, no?" said the Agent trying to appear indifferent. But the Expressman saw through it as he noted the Agent sweeping glass off the platform on to the right of way and noted also the absence of all windows on the west side of the Agent's little ticket office.

"Well I should say! And have you heard about the church?"

"Mr. Chase's—−" The Agent paused in his sweeping and looked interested. "You don't mean−−I haven't been up town. Haven't been able to leave."

"Naw. The Methodist. The roof's down in the cellar an' the organ is on top o' the pulpit. Total wreck. I just drove by it."

"Well, I should call that providential."

"Maybe," said the Expressman slowly. "But I don't believe the Methodists look at it that way. What's providential for one party is somp'n else for the other party."

"You bet. No. 12 is six hours late. That's providential for me because I've got all this muss to clean up. But somehow I'm glad it wa'n't Mr. Chase's church."

"Same here," said the Expressman. "I didn't get to go to church last night. I don't guess nobody went. The corner of his platform got under the wind and the hull business blew away. They wa'n't even a nail left. Jest nothin' but standin' room only."

"It was some blow all right," said the Agent as he continued to shove the glass off the platform. "There haint a wire standing between here and Newton, and it'll take the gang all day to clear the drift wood out of the bridge up there. The creek rose ten feet in ten minutes. We hain't had such a breeze since ninety−four."

The people of Red Hill generally were greatly excited over the storm which has assumed in spots the character of a "twister."

Howard and Rose, Deacon Burton, Mrs. Burton, Agnes, Mrs. Wilson and little Miss Wilson and a group of church people were out in the Congregational Church yard, noting various freaks of the wind and excitedly exchanging experiences. Howard was looking over the limb strewn yard and calling Deacon Burton's attention to the fact that one lone electric lamp was hanging unbroken from a corner of the chimney, swinging by a bit of cord about six inches long. That was all that was left of the wiring Howard had run all over the front yard. But with the exception of the platform's complete disappearance, leaving, as the Expressman had said, "standing room only," the church had suffered no damage except the loss of a few window panes.

"I thought you said Kansas never had any cyclones, Deacon Burton," said Howard gravely as he and the deacon went into the church to look around. "What do you call the thing we had last night?"

Deacon Burton hesitated. "Well it came nearer being the real thing than Red Hill ever saw before, and I've been here ever since the Santa Fe came through. We got off pretty well. Of course you've heard about the Methodists."

"Yes," said Howard, "I understand their building is a total wreck."

"Just about. Nothing left but the foundation and that was visited in spots."

They came out of the church and joined the group outside.

"Nothing hurt here," said Deacon Burton cheerfully. "Only a few panes of glass gone and a little plaster wet. Not enough to mention."

"But our church is all gone, Mr. Burton," said Mrs. Wilson tearfully. "We are going over to look at it."

Little Miss Wilson had slipped up to Howard and her moist little hand had gone into his.

"Then if our church is gone we can be Congregestionalists, can't we, Mother?"

"You appear to be one now " said Mrs. Wilson. Deacon Burton hastily spoke up.

"Let's all go over. Maybe it's not so bad as they say."

The group moved out of the church yard, Agnes Burton walking along by Miss Wilson who hung close to Howard.

"It was a great disappointment to lose the service last night, wasn't it, Mr. Chase?" Agnes said. She was holding Miss Wilson's other hand as they walked along.

"Yes. Yes." He was in one of his absent moods for a moment. Then he suddenly came back again.

"Oh, I beg pardon, Miss Burton. The service? I was lotting,−−that's the word, isn't it−−on a great time last night. And it came, but not the way I expected. There was one while there just before the storm broke when I believe I was actually afraid."

"I didn't suppose you could ever be afraid of anything, Mr. Chase."

"Why not?"

"Because any man who could accept a call to a little country town church like ours when he might have a city church must be a brave man."

Howard Chase looked over the head of little Miss Wilson at Miss Burton in real astonishment.

"How do you know I could get a call to a city church?"

"Any one would know it after last Sunday."

Miss Burton spoke naturally and smiled as she spoke. But Howard Chase was looking straight ahead and when he spoke it was with a grave note as if ignoring Miss Burton's statement and all it implied.

"I accepted the first call I had, Miss Burton. But I would have come west anyway."

"Do you like the west, cyclones and all?"

"Yes,−−and all."

Then the girl asked another question which astonished him more than anything she had yet said and he realised afterwards, he had not, so far, until now, during this short walk, spoken more than twenty words to her seriously.

"Why should you come into this overcrowded church town to break your heart over an impossible ecclesiastical situation, over a problem that never can be solved, at least, not in this generation?"

"Break my heart—−" He had broken out over her statement, blurting out rudely the first thing that his astonished impulse impelled him to say, looking at her directly, noting the rising colour of her face, and for the first time the keen intellectual flash of her eye, but little Miss Wilson tugged at his hand, as he had stopped a second−−

"Come, Mr. Chase. See! Where our church is gone!"

They had reached the Methodist Church yard and a large group of people had gathered to look at the ruin, for ruin it was that greeted the newcomers.

By some fantastic freak of the mysterious wind the four walls of the building had been blown entirely away. Parts of them were found afterwards miles away on the prairie, some of the windows intact. But the roof of the church had turned completely over and then twisted around and lay like a great funnel wedged in between the foundation walls. Parts of the organ lay scattered over the pulpit, one corner of which projected out from a section of the roof. Pieces of pews, chairs, rain soaked hymn books and two sections of furnace pipe lay about the church yard while branches of trees and pieces of lumber, and dishes from the church kitchen lay strewn over the entire wreckage.

The Rev. Alfred Noyes was there with his flock, eyeing the mixture of his church with grave concern.

"A total loss." Howard heard him say to Mrs. Wilson who had gone up to express her sympathy.

Howard and Deacon Burton each said a word, each in his own way.

"After all elder," said the deacon, "you ought to, be thankful you and your people weren't in it last night. It was providential no one was hurt or killed."

"Well, of course I am thankful for that," said Brother Noyes. "But we had no insurance against cyclones and our loss will be heavy. It's a great blow to my people."

And then Howard, acting on the impulse of the moment, thinking no farther than an honest thought for others, went up close to Noyes and said, "Brother Noyes, our people will be glad to have you use our church part of the time for services until—−"

At that point he felt a pull on his coat sleeve and Deacon Burton was nodding to him.

Brother Noyes had started to say, "Why, I appreciate that—−" when a new group of his parishioners came up excitedly to talk over the situation.

Deacon Burton drew his minister off to one side.

"Now, see here, Brother Chase, you can't go to inviting the Methodists into our church without consulting the members."

"Why not?"

"Well, it hain't in order. Deacon Allen will oppose it and there's a number of others."

Howard controlled himself. Then he smiled at Deacon Burton one of those rare winsome smiles that made little children and rough grown−up men fall in love with him.

"All right, Brother Burton, we'll bring it up at the midweek service."

"Oh, I think the church will invite them all right," Deacon Burton said quickly. "But it ought to be voted on. Of course we want to do the right thing."

The church yard, that part of it not encumbered with the debris of the storm had filled up with Red Hill population. Practically the entire Methodist membership was present. The Rev. Alfred Noyes was the centre of a commiserating group. His people were walking over the ruins, pulling out pieces of lumber, the women seeking to save a few pieces of crockery from the wreckage of the kitchen when one of the church officers who had been working away at the pulpit shouted to Brother Noyes to come over.

"Look here!" one cried excitedly. "Look! The Bible is lying here open. Not a leaf torn!"

The Rev. Alfred Noyes examined it. The leaves were rain soaked but uninjured otherwise. He glanced down the page that was open until his eye fell on this passage: "For the Lord shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." Isaiah 51:3.

He read it out loud to the group, and lifting his head looked around.

"It's a prophecy, a plain, providential sign to us. We will rebuild the walls of Zion and enlarge our borders. The people will rally to us in our distress. The Mission Board will help us with a loan. Let us not despair, my friends. Let us rally together around our beloved church and rebuild."

Mrs. Wilson, who had been crying, turned to one of the other women.

"Now isn't that wonderful. Talk about miracles. We can go ahead and build again. Remember how we worked over this building? We can put up a better one."

"I believe we can," said the other woman. "The Lord seems to be with us. After all, maybe this storm was providential."

Howard walked along to the main business street with Deacon Burton who had been due at his store for an hour.

"What do you call providential?" asked the deacon, glancing at the young minister as they went along.

Howard grinned as he returned the deacon's look. He was fast coming to have more than a liking for his senior deacon, it was growing into a feeling of real affection mingled with respect for his shrewd mental quickness.

"The word `providential' depends on the point of view, whether you're looking up or down."

"If the Methodists rebuild," said the Deacon slowly, "it will be a mistake, not a providence, as I see it. Years ago we made a proposition to them that we combine our forces, and if it hadn't been for one or two people higher up I think we would have put it through. And I couldn't help feeling−−might as well confess−−when I heard the storm had ruined their building that maybe now we could get together. But it doesn't look like it. Brother Noyes is great on the Bible. If he works that sentence on the people at the Mission Board he will get the thing going again, and this town is too small for four churches. We can't afford to support all of 'em."

"Why, you don't help support any but our own, do you?"

Deacon Burton stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, and looked at Howard gravely.

"How do you suppose four churches can live in a town of seven hundred and fifty people? If the Methodists rebuild the walls of Zion every merchant in Red Hill will be expected to contribute. For the last fifteen years I have been giving my quota to all the churches here. If it isn't in one shape it's in another. If it isn't a regular hold−up subscription, it's a fair, or a sale, or a clean up of some sort."

"I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"Or you wouldn't have come, maybe?"

"I don't say that. We have as much right here as the others, haven't we?"

"Sure. But we've got churches to burn and blow away. Only it looks like they won't stay blowed."

The deacon delivered himself of this with a grimace and a shrug, as he came to his store and Howard left him

there.

"I think now I'm here, I'll step over and see Deacon Allen about letting the Methodists use the church. We've got to be decent even if we're not good Christians."

"All right." Deacon Burton grinned. "I don't know how Brother Allen will stand."

Howard crossed the street and Deacon Burton watched him go into Deacon Allen's place of business.

He was there about ten minutes. When he came out he started to cross the street and go into Deacon Burton's, but paused, seemed to change his mind and started back to the parsonage.

As he turned the corner going west from the main street he met Inez Clark.

He was going by with a bow and a "Good−morning, Miss Clark," but Inez stopped almost in front of him and said:

"Father wanted me to say if I saw you that, seeing as how the storm spoiled the outdoor meeting last night, he would strike off five hundred more dodgers for nothing if you wanted them for next Sunday."

"I appreciate that. Please tell your father so. But I don't know yet about the service. We may have a union meeting with the Methodists."

"Oh, I hope not!" Inez exclaimed. "Why should they spoil our plans?"

Howard did not say anything, only looked at the girl gravely.

"I don't like the Methodists," Inez said with blunt emphasis. Howard felt and looked amused. But he started on, simply saying, "Thank your father for his offer. If we have our service I'll bring the copy over in time."

She did not say anything in answer, but as he turned the next corner to go up to the parsonage he glanced back and saw Inez still standing where they had met. She was not looking in his direction, but she was standing perfectly still.

Howard went on to the parsonage and into his little study. As he sat down to his desk he struck it a blow with a hard fist. Then he put his elbows on the desk and stared open eyed and grave at a picture on top of the desk and in the middle of it.

It was a picture Roy Lennox had given him after a trip abroad.

It was a picture of Christ in the desert. On a brightly illuminated high tableland in the background marched a profession of kings, emperors, warriors, the high and mighty and strong of the earth and behind them a gloriously apparelled group of artists, musicians, scholars and scientists. Then followed a group of laughing girls and in the centre, drawing all others to her, was an alluring figure, representing woman, in all her blending of mysterious good and evil, holding out a jewelled hand beckoning the one who looked at her to come and walk with her.

The artist had so arranged this line of figures in the world procession that this woman focussed all attention on herself at first.

But as one looked closer at the picture he saw crowding up around Jesus, beseeching faces and pitiful outstretched hands, the hands of disease and want and despair. The whole world for all time to come was there, clinging to his garments, stretching out agonising arms like drowning people, and one fair woman, oh, so wondrous fair, was kissing the Master's feet, her streaming hair covered with dust and the trace of a hideous human foot on her neck.

Christ himself in this picture, up at which Howard was now looking, was gazing neither at the world greatness and allurement on the table−land, nor at the world sorrow below but his face was lifted above a dark circle towards an opening in a cloud out of which one line of light fell straight down until it rested on the face of the woman who lay at Jesus' feet. And the effect of the picture was finally to leave the spectator doing what the artist had planned−−leaving him with his gaze absolutely on the face of Christ obliterating all other figures, even those of the alluring woman above and the sinful woman below.

Howard could hear his sister in the dining room at work on something. He sat at his desk a few minutes then he went over and quietly closed the door, stood a moment in the middle of the room and then suddenly knelt at his chair and flung his head upon his hands with a muffled cry.

But in a moment he was on his feet again and going out into the other room began to tell his sister about his plans for the coming Sunday.

"I asked Brother Noyes to use our church for services. Deacon Burton objected and said I ought to consult our members."

"I should think so, Howard, you will get into trouble. You are not a pope here."

"I'd like to be for a while. Do 'em good. Some one has got to lead."

"Or drive," said Rose who admired her brother immensely, but had great common sense and was not afraid of using it for his benefit.

"People don't like to be driven, Howard. Coax 'em."

"But how about those who can't be coaxed?"

"People who can't be coaxed are the kind that can't be driven."

"Well, I tell you, sister, first the minister has to go in front and pull and then he has to go behind and shove."

"The good shepherd is generally in front," said Rose quietly.

"Well, I guess you're right, sister. But I got in front of Deacon Allen this morning and for a while I was afraid he was going to run over me. But he finally came along like−−like−−a little lamb, to use the figure we've started with."

"What did you do? I'm a little afraid of Deacon Allen. But isn't Deacon Burton lovely? And Agnes?"

"Yes, I think the deacon is great. But Deacon Allen−−well−−he's the great objector, I find. He's good−−Oh, he good, but he's awful good. He'll want his heavenly crown sent up on approval and have it taken in at the bottom or the pearls reset. But I think I understand him pretty well. I finally got his consent on conditions."

"Consent to what? You haven't told me."

"Why, consent to invite the Methodists to use our church a part of the time for their services. When I looked at their ruin this morning it didn't seem to me anything less than common decency to offer it."

"But it will spoil your plans for services, won't it, if you—−"

"Yes, of course it will. But I'll have to work all the harder in between Sundays. A minister's main work is done during the week."

"Maybe the other churches will offer the use of their buildings part of the time. It seems too bad for you to give up your plan for the Sunday evening."

"Perhaps we can unite in some way. But I am hungry to preach. I don't want to listen to Brother Noyes. I want to preach myself."

"And you ought to, Howard. I don't believe you realise what a gift you have that way. A week ago Sunday, the first Sunday, I saw people listening to your sermon who I am sure don't generally care for sermons. There was one girl in the chorus, that Inez Clark, who seemed to be just completely absorbed in what you were saying. She isn't the kind of a girl, I am sure, that usually cares for preaching. She is a pretty girl, but it's a magazine cover kind, and by the way, Agnes Burton dropped a word this morning about her that interested me. She said Inez Clark was going crazy over the moving picture shows and wondered if we could do anything to get her interested in something else."

Howard had been moving over towards his study door. He stopped with his back to his sister.

"What did Miss Burton say?"

"Why, she said the girl was going to the show every night and was in danger of several things. She said she was a romantic, highly imaginative thing, had been all through high school course, and she feels deeply interested in her."

"I don't see what—−" Howard began. Then after a pause−−"I'll talk with Miss Burton about it." He went into his study leaving the door open. He sat down to his desk and began to plan out his programme for the week. He had been at work about an hour when his sister came in.

"I'm going over to the church, Howard, to rehearse with Miss Burton. You know I'm to sing a solo next Sunday, and she is going to play for me. I haven't sung in a long time. But I−−I−−want to do all I can to help you. It's the only way I can keep from—−"

"Dear girl—−" said Howard. "I know. I know. You're the bravest woman I know." The tear was in his eye as he kissed her.

She went out and he resumed his work.

Then he found he had left his hymn book over in the church and he needed it to make some selections.

He went out, crossed the yard and went in. The door and windows were open and Rose and Miss Burton were up on the platform. Rose was singing "My Redeemer," by Dudley Buck, and her voice sounded sweet to Howard. It was not strong nor specially good in any technical way, but she sang with feeling and while he knew nothing of music and could not sing a note himself he did know enough about it to detect the difference between what was

decently good and atrociously bad.

He went up to the pulpit to get his own copy and Rose stopped and said, "How does it sound?"

"Sounds all right to me. You know, Miss Burton, my sister is safe in asking me that. She knows I couldn't give her but one answer."

"She sings truly, Mr. Chase. Most people can't sing this solo without spoiling this part−−`scourged and mocked and crucified'."

Rose looked pleased.

"Oh, that makes me think. I have another selection that I wanted you to try. I'll run over to the house and get it. Won't be gone but a minute." She ran out, and Howard, after a second of hesitation, went over to the organ and stood there looking earnestly at Miss Burton. She had gone on playing when Rose left but when Howard came up, she stopped as he said:

"Excuse me, Miss Burton, but I want to ask you about Miss Clark. My sister says you have been talking to her about the girl."

"Yes. Inez is one of my high school girls. She graduated two years ago. Since then she has been helping her father in his office. The girl has great possibilities for either good or bad."

"Rose says you told her the girl was crazy over the moving picture shows. Can't her father regulate that?"

"Mr. Clark does not seem to know or care what Inez does outside the office. He is trying to invent a new typesetting machine. He is wholly absorbed in it at night. Often, Inez has told me, he does not get home until one or two o'clock."

"What kind of shows do they have here?"

"All kinds. But mostly they are cheap sensational films dealing with highly coloured, romantic episodes in the lives of girls who have abnormal experiences."

"Do you ever go to the shows?"

Miss Burton coloured and then laughed. But when she answered her tone was suddenly all serious.

"I made a special study, psychological, I mean, of the whole film business when I was in the University. In fact it was the theme of my essay in the sociological department. That meant I had to go to a good many of the shows at Lawrence and study them. I found the majority of them were−−were−−well−−wrong in their views of life and I can easily see what will happen to Inez if she accepts the film view of life for the true thing."

Howard was getting more and more interested. He was on the point of asking more questions when Rose came in. As she came up the aisle her brother said:

"Rose, Miss Burton and I have been talking about Miss Clark. I wish you would ask Miss Burton more about the matter. I must go back to my study. We want to do what we can. I think it is more a case for you women than for—−"

He abruptly went down the aisle and out of the church, swinging along in his quick but not noisy habit and once back in his little study, sat staring at the Christ on his desk.

"What was this girl to him? One of his flock. Why had she thus suddenly come into his problems to complicate and perhaps seriously embarrass them? A magazine cover type. A chorus girl type in this little Kansas town. A girl with romantic dreams, with abnormal desires, who had already boldly if not unmaidenly shown her feelings−−he shuddered at a new peril hitherto unknown to his knightly soul and for a moment he felt real fear. Then he smiled. And said "No!" as he looked up at the Christ. Here was only one of the flock, of his flock, in peril of something. He had only one duty, to rescue, to save. Was not that what he was there for? Yea, verily. There was no such thing as a woman in the case, only a soul in danger of eternal loss. And he−−simply a means to save. He would find out more about it from his sister's talk with Miss Burton. And he would go himself and see the shows and protect the others of his flock from their influence if it was as bad as Miss Burton said.

When Rose came back to the house, she gave Howard the result of her talk with Miss Burton. There was not much more than she had already revealed. Only she thought from some word Inez had dropped at a chorus rehearsal that she had an ambition to be a film actress.

"She's just the kind you see in the pictures. Of course if she succeeded as many of them do, it might not be bad for her. If she has talent that way, why not encourage it?"

Howard spoke on the impulse of the moment just what he thought, and his sister, although accustomed to his abrupt expression of his real thought was startled by it.

"Miss Burton spoke of that. But she said Inez was not the kind of a girl who could stand the test of that kind of life. She is quite positive it would be not the making of her but the ruin of her."

There was quite a silence in the little study.

Then Howard said:

"I'm going in to see what the shows are in this town."

"Do you think you ought to do that?"

"Yes. And I'm going to. Looks like a necessary thing to me. How can I guard my young people against a thing I don't know. I want to see it for myself."

Rose did not answer. Then Howard smiled his rare smile as he said:

"I feel as jealous of my flock as if I were a real shepherd, defending it from real wolves. You wouldn't have me run at the first howl, would you, sister?"

"No," said Rose with a sigh. "But sometimes I'm afraid for you. You need−−you need−−well you know Howard, there are so many delicate and embarrassing things in the ministry−−you need a wife. There!"

"When I have you?"

"It is not the same."

To this he said nothing and Rose after viewing him gravely went out to her work.

He discovered that the principal nights for the best shows were Wednesday and Saturday. And when Wednesday night came he went down on the business street and stopped out in front of the little hall where the shows were given.

It was a white painted front with a profusion of electric lights; he noted as he looked up and down the street it was the one brilliant spot. The usual highly coloured posters were on the boards out in front and he stopped to look at them."

One represented a young man leaping a chasm about five thousand feet deep, holding a girl in his arms, and pursued by a gang of ruffians on horseback. In the near distance an airship could be seen approaching.

The other poster depicted a drunken man trying to climb a church steeple. A policeman was after him, but making slow progress on account of a heavy bulldog clinging to his coat−tails. This was supposed to be the comic film of the evening.

He bought his nickel slip and went in.

The hall was not large, it had once been a billiard hall, but it had opera chairs and looked fairly clean and had electric fans going.

It was about half filled and people were coming in quite steadily. More than half the audience was boys and girls under fifteen. They were laughing, giggling and eating peanuts and candy. There was a pianola at the curtain end of the room and five minutes before the films began, a girl went down the aisle, took her place at the instrument and began to unroll the "Overture to William Tell."

Howard had taken a seat in the last row almost under the booth that contained the film and it had started its click and buzz when a girl seated four rows ahead of him turned and looked up at the little square hole in the booth.

It was light enough in the room to distinguish faces, and as the girl was about to turn around and face the curtain she lowered her gaze and Howard recognised Inez. He could not tell as she turned around whether she had seen him or not. But within the next ten minutes an event so unexpected took place that even the presence of Inez and the reason for his own presence there was forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

The film had been going for two or three minutes. The little room was almost filled. The story started out with a scene in a stenographer's office in some big city, and the plot rapidly developed around a gold mine in Arizona, and the disowned son of a member of the firm who was working in his father's office in disguise and was being falsely accused of picking the lock of the safe.

Howard was following the story with a mixture of contempt and reluctant interest, when he saw Miss Burton going down the aisle. She took a seat at the left of Inez and behind her, but from her look in that direction Howard could not fail to note even in the dimly lighted room that Miss Burton had come for some definite purpose and that Inez was the object of it.

Film stories have at least the art of developing situations with great rapidity. It seems to be the first rule of the film to have something happening every second. In a surprisingly short time the disowned son of the big city firm had succeeded in unearthing a big conspiracy with his father's gold mine in Arizona, he had fallen in love with the stenographer, knocked down one of the firm who had insulted her, had been arrested for robbing the safe and was at work in prison on a model for a new airship. Meanwhile, not to be left behind in the matter of action the stenographer had taken service in the home of her employer as a maid and in that capacity was securing valuable evidence against one of the villains in the story−−of whom there were a dozen−−and getting ready to reveal her identity as the saviour of the young man's honour and the glorious heroine of the piece.

It was so melodramatic, so slushy and silly and awfully outrageous that Howard snorted at it inwardly and more than once felt like getting up and roaring out a loud−voiced protest. Every artistic sense in him rebelled at the crude half−baked scheme of life presented by the people in film−land. It was not any lack of courage or audacity that kept him still when he felt the impulse to shout out his protest, but a sense of the utter uselessness of such a cry. The fault lay farther back. Whoever wrote such stuff−−and evidently the name was Legion−−was the real cause of the conditions and the false life philosophy and he did not know who he was or how to reach him and wring his neck as he would like to do.

And with it all, as the lurid tale shot, wriggling and howling across the screen, Howard could not shut out the thought of the effect of all this trash on the mind and heart of the girl sitting in front of him. What must be the mental and moral chaos of a human creature who fed on this sort of stuff and lived and breathed this atmosphere with no antidote and no other look at life except that afforded by the artificial puppets dancing at the end of the strings pulled by the commercialised machinery of the made−to−order sins and virtues of the characters doing their stunts for so much per in order to thrill souls like Inez with vague but constant passion to go and do likewise.

And what could he do in the matter to save the girl, if, as Miss Burton said, she was in danger of being lost through her fascination for the life portrayed on the screen? Why not let the girl go to Los Angeles or New York or somewhere and work out her destiny? Such girls were never satisfied unless they finally made the trial. She was a type. What could any one do with a chorus girl type?

And then as he sat there, his mouth grew set, his jaws rigid, his eyes filled with deep black, he clenched the sides of his chair with muscular grip as he said to himself, "She is one of my flock. If she is in danger of going astray I am a poor coward of a shepherd if I excuse myself and let the wolves get her. The power of Jesus to save is not limited. He never recognised any types and never excused any from salvation on account of birth or temperament. No! He owed it to his position as pastor to—−"

He had, as his custom was, detached himself completely from his surroundings and was mentally alone. He had lost all physical sense of what was going on around him and the pictures on the screen no longer were visualised by him.

And then with a sudden fling, as it were, all his acute bodily powers were in a moment on the alert, a sense of impelling accident and danger grew swift upon him.

Something wrong had happened up there in the little metal booth where the man was working the film.

There had been a commotion in the little metal booth, then a cry, then a puff of smoke and a fall, people had turned in their seats and looked up at the little opening, confused voices and shouts arose, and Howard, obeying his keen and swift instinct trained in athletic ways had darted up the short flight of steps leading from the front of

the show−place to the operator's booth.

He pulled the door open, and a sheet of flame smote him in the face. The operator was lying on the floor, crumpled up against his machine. Howard seized him by his feet, dragged him out on the little landing, lifted him up and carried him down the stairs. Down in the little entrance−way frightened people were crowding one another in a panic to get out. Even in the excitement and behind the body he was carrying, Howard was aware of Inez near the door, just going out, Miss Burton next to her, in fact with an arm about her as if she had sought her out at the first sound of danger and had found a place near her.

Howard shouted to the little crowd to give him room to get his burden outdoors, at the same time calming the excitement by his own quiet tone. Every one came out of the building unharmed, but in five minutes after the film had taken fire the interior of the place was blazing and before the fire department could get to work the room was destroyed, together with the adjoining building.

Howard carried the man across the street and into the little drug store which happened to be just opposite. As he laid him down on the floor, he began to feel faint himself and for the first time realised that his face was burned.

The crowd that always gathers in time of accident began to pour into the store. Many of the people who had followed Howard across the street were trying to get in, and as Howard staggered up from over his unconscious burden the first faces he recognised in the doorway were those of Miss Burton and Inez.

They both cried out at the sight of him and crowded up to him together.

"You are hurt!" they exclaimed together.

"No, I think not. Just a little burn. There ought to be a doctor for this man. Oh, they've sent for him? Now, then, folks, there's nothing you can do here."

He sat down in one of the little wire−backed chairs by the soda water tables and again felt faint. But Inez spoke, and what she said stirred a feeling like anger in him so strong that he got up.

"What a wonderful thing to do, Mr. Chase!"

"What! What's that?" He spoke so sharply that the girl was startled. But she continued to gaze at him with the eye of the hero worshipper. Miss Burton, her face very pale and questioning, had a hand on Inez' arm as if to lead her out of the store.

"It was a great, brave thing to do," said Inez.

A little murmur of applause came from the group that stood around. Just then the doctor came in. Howard waited long enough to find out that the film operator was not seriously hurt, and then he got up, still feeling faint, but what Inez had said and the murmur of admiration that followed provoked him into a burst of anger.

"You people get out and give the doctor a chance. Any man in Red Hill who wouldn't do—−"

He looked at Miss Burton, smiled grimly at Inez and then said gently, "Excuse me, folks. Nothing more to do here."

He went out with his swift but noiseless manner, carrying with him the glance Miss Burton gave him, a glance that seemed to convey a perfect knowledge of what his feelings were.

"How did she understand that?" he found himself saying as he walked along to the parsonage after stopping on the street a moment to watch the fire.

But Inez was protesting to Miss Burton as the two went out of the store.

"I don't know what Mr. Chase is mad about. It *a brave thing to do. What a picture it would make! Any man in Red Hill do a thing like that! There isn't one I know has the muscle to carry a singed cat across the street, to say nothing of a heavy man like Jake Seymour. I don't know why he should get angry at what I said!"*

"Perhaps he has a little modesty, as brave men are apt to have, and doesn't like to hear himself praised in public," Miss Burton said, slowly, a slight blush on her cheek as she spoke.

"Then," said Inez boldly, "the next time I see Mr. Chase alone, I'll tell him what I think."

"I wouldn't if I were you. He won't like it."

"Any man likes to be told he is a hero."

"Not Mr. Chase."

"How do you know?"

"I'm pretty sure he wouldn't."

They had been talking rapidly as they stood in the street with the crowd there watching the fire. They lingered

until the company had put it out and then started for Inez' home, Miss Burton going with the girl, thinking it a favourable opportunity to say to her a few things that had been on her mind since the talk with Chase that Monday morning.

The people of Red Hill lived on their porches in the summer, so Inez did not ask Miss Burton to come into the house, but the two sat down in the porch chairs. The night was warm, but a soft breeze blew from the south and the starlight made objects visible in outline, but not in detail. Going over it many times afterwards, Agnes Burton was thankful for the obscurity of that May night on Inez' porch when the girl so unexpectedly revealed her secret.

She had started to tell Inez why she had gone into the show, when Inez almost took the explanation out of her mouth.

"I know you think I ought not to go to the movies so often, Miss Burton, but I just can't help it. Something seems to just pull me right in. It's the only thing in Red Hill that interests me."

"Did you enjoy the story to−night?" Miss Burton, back in the shadow of the porch, asked the question to get Inez' point of view.

"I thought it was fine. Wasn't it grand to see that business man get his when he insulted the stenographer? I just wanted to get my hands on him. I hope they'll put on the story again when Seymour gets another place. I'm crazy to know how it comes out."

Miss Burton did not say anything, and after a moment Inez said:

"What did *think of it?"*

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course, or I wouldn't ask."

"Inez, the whole thing was absurd. The plot was unreal. The action was silly. The situations all made up. No one ever does such things in actual life. The average business man in the city never thinks of insulting his stenographer. She is just as safe in his office as if she were in her own home. And young men like the hero in the play don't act as he did."

"People do fall in love, though, don't they, Miss Burton? You can't deny that."

"Yes, of course they do. But—−"

"And they're not reasonable about it, either. They don't do it according to any rule or the way other people would arrange it for them, do they, Miss Burton?"

"I suppose not." The answer came slowly, and after a pause, back there in the shadow.

"If you were in love yourself, you wouldn't act natural, would you?" Inez persisted. "You wouldn't care how you did act." The girl went on as if leading up to something that lay on her heart. And Agnes Burton listening there in the shadow, no hint in her own mind of the facts about Inez, began to wonder at the new note in the girl's voice. She had known her ever since she was a child and as her high school teacher had come to have a deep interest in her, but had never been fully her confidante.

But she took occasion now to bring the talk back to the film.

"It was the story as a whole that struck me as silly. It was not true to life as a whole, Inez, and the effect of it on your own heart and mind is not healthy. That is the reason I went over tonight, dear. I know the films are doing you harm. You are being unsettled by them. You are in danger of getting wrong ideas of life from them."

"And what ideas of life have I ever got out of this stupid little town, anyway!" Inez suddenly burst out. "What is there here for a girl to do or be except to work and go to church and meet all the stupid people one has met ever since you were born. What is there for me in this place? I'm sick of sticking type and watching Dad tinker over that pile of cogs and levers and wheels. I want excitement and something doing. I feel like being wicked for a change. A thing like what happened tonight just makes life seem worth having. I crave city life. I want adventure−−I—−"

The girl was going on in a torrent of unaccustomed confidence, and Miss Burton did not interrupt, hoping Inez would free her mind and give her full confidence. But she had stopped suddenly as if fearful of herself or as if doubting how far she could safely go in letting her high school teacher know any more.

Miss Burton moved her chair nearer Inez and put a hand on her hand, which lay on the arm of the chair.

"I believe I understand how you feel, Inez. But what could you do if you went to the city? Your friends are all here. Your father is good to you. The town is small and there isn't much excitement in it, to be sure, but Red Hill is in a beautiful part of God's world and there is nothing to hinder you from going on with your reading and your

education. You used to do some writing, as I remember. The *would take some of the things you used to imagine. And doesn't the church mean anything to you? Our chorus is interesting. And Mr. Chase−−" −−a curious note of quiet hesitation crept into Agnes Burton's voice "Mr. Chase is going to make things interesting in the church."*

Inez was very still. The soft night breeze blew across the porch and stirred the leaves of the Madeira vine at the end where Miss Burton had sat. A group of people went by talking about the fire. "Mr. Chase carried Jake Seymour clear across the street. I call that—−" a girlish voice exclaimed in a high treble and the words and the noises of the group passed away down the street, leaving silence on the porch.

And then Inez suddenly burst out, clutching Miss Burton's hand so hard that it hurt.

"Miss Burton, I don't care. I've got to tell some one. I can't always live this way all to myself. And I believe you will know how I−−I don't care to go away now−−I−−I the church−−it's all−−I'm in love with Mr. Chase and I know it's no use. And I'm awfully wretched and unhappy and at the same time I'm happy. I never felt so before−−the very sight of him makes me tremble all over as if I couldn't stand, and I−−I−−I'd marry him tonight if−−if he'd ask me and go anywhere or do anything he'd ask me. I don't feel wicked when I see or hear him. He's heavens above me and I know it's no use, but I do love him. He's . *Different from all the stupid men in Red Hill. He's like the people in−−in stories. He does the things they do. He can't help it. He's born to do them. And I'm in love with him. Oh, Miss Burton−−I know it's no use. Help me to get away somewhere. I'm so wretched. But I'm happy too. What will become of me. What was I born for, anyhow?"*

Poor Inez, in a torrent of self revelation, had blown up the flood gates and let the long imprisoned waters out. And the girl's confession swept down over Agnes Burton like a cloud burst. She had gasped as if suddenly immersed in ice water, but when Inez finally ceased she was saying to her calmly enough: "How could such a thing come to you so suddenly?"

"I don't know, Miss Burton, unless I was all ready for it."

"But he hasn't been here two weeks. He—−"

"It doesn't seem to make any difference. Seems as if I'd known him all my life. And I know it's useless. I'm not his sort. But−−oh, you don't think it's very wicked in me to love him, do you−−do you, Miss Burton?"

Inez flung herself out of her chair at Miss Burton's feet and laid her head on her lap. Agnes Burton folded the sobbing girl's head in her arms. After a while she said, as if talking to a child:

"Dear, it's not wicked to love−−it's the most beautiful thing in the world−−but−−but−−I don't see−−how−−you—−"

There was silence, only Inez' body shook with her low sobbing. Then she said, talking in muffled voice, as she kneeled there, "I ought to go away. A girl like me doesn't belong in a little country town. I belong in a big city. In my dreams I am always walking the streets of big cities. And−−and−−I'm afraid if I stay here I'll−−I'll get Mr. Chase into trouble."

"No! No!" Agnes Burton started up so suddenly that Inez was thrown back. "You don't mean—−"

"Miss Burton, I don't know what I mean. I'm so unhappy, so wretched. I can't bear it to live this life. It's all so unreal to me so stupid−−or it was until−−he came—−"

"You poor child!"

Agnes Burton sank back in her chair and again her hands fell gently and caressingly on Inez' head.

After a while Inez said, more calmly, lifting a lovely but tear−stained face to her teacher, "What do you think I ought to do?"

"I don't know. Let me think."

"What would you do in my place?"

"I don't know. It's not an easy thing to do. Only−−let me ask you one question−−Mr. Chase, of course, does not know anything about all this."

"I'm afraid he does."

"You haven't—−"

"He knows," said Inez, speaking so slowly and positively that Miss Burton let her hands fall from the girl's head and she drew back in her chair a little. Inez, falling back on her knees, crouching there on the porch floor, spoke in a low, steady voice. that made Miss Burton shiver.

"I haven't been able to conceal it. He is not a fool. But his soul is as pure as an angel's. I ought not to be talking about him even to you. But all through the years I have been living here with myself all alone. And

to−night it seemed to me I could endure it no longer. My father cares for me, all right, but he thinks more of his invention than of me. And other people don't interest me. Miss Burton, won't you help me to go away? If you don't I'll run away. I want excitement. I can't live here now after—−"

Her voice trailed away into the quiet that now brooded over the night. The breeze had died down. Not even a small leaf on the vine quivered. Miss Burton got up slowly. Inez got to her feet.

"I'll have to go home, Inez. I'm sorry. You can't understand."

"Oh, you don't think there's any chance for me, do you?" Inez broke out, gripping Agnes Burton's arm so hard it left a mark.

"No, no−−I don't. He Mr. Chase is—−"

"He's different. I know. But I'm not sorry I love him. It doesn't make me any worse."

She said it defiantly, and turned slowly and went into the house. And Agnes Burton went home through the soft, silent May night, more disturbed and roused by that experience than by any event in her hitherto quiet, well−poised, happy girlhood.

When Howard came into the parsonage that evening his sister was working at something out in the kitchen. As she heard him enter, she came into the sitting−room.

As she came closer to him she threw up her hands and exclaimed:

"Howard Chase! What's the matter with you? What have you been doing? Where have you been?"

Howard replied with one of his well−known grins:

"I've been to the show. Don't I look as if I had?"

"You surely do. Why, mercy! Your eyebrows are all burned off!"

"No. Are they?" he said soberly.

He walked into his little bedroom which was off the sitting−room, turned on the light, and stared into his looking−glass. Then he turned to Rose, who had followed him into the room.

"Looks pretty bad, doesn't it? But I believe they'll grow out again."

He rubbed his fingers over the burnt places and grinned again, but could not avoid a look of real annoyance.

Rose laughed. But instantly stopped.

"You can't preach like that next Sunday."

"Why not? What have eyebrows to do with preaching?"

"I never saw the use of eyebrows before," said Rose. "But they look quite important when they're gone. You wouldn't go into the pulpit looking like that, would you?"

"I'm going, just the same. It will punish me for my pride over my good looks." He grinned again as he walked out into the sitting room.

"Pride! I never knew a man with so little. You haven't any vanity."

"Plenty of it, sister. If you really only knew how discomforted I feel over my looks right this minute you would spend the rest of the night praying that I might be converted."

"Don't be foolish. Tell me, you silly boy, what happened. All about it." He gave her the story of the evening, dwelling lightly on his own act, but emphasising the incidents of the film and Inez and Miss Burton.

"I don't believe you've told me the best part of it. But I'll get it from Agnes. And your face is burned, too. Why don't you tell me all about it? You'll have blisters there."

She rose and went into her room and brought out some ointment and rubbed it over his face, scolding him meanwhile as he laughed at her.

"I'll apply for a Carnegie medal for you."

"And hang it over my eyebrows. Or, rather, over the place where they were. Good idea. But I tell you, Rose, it was all worth while. I need a little excitement to keep me going. And when Seymour gets up I'm going to see if we can't manage to reform this film business. Pictures like the one tonight are simply a travesty on life. Miss Burton is right when she says they are demoralising to girls like Inez Clark. Do you know, that girl is a city type. The first time I saw her I couldn't help thinking of a picture I saw in a film magazine. Why, she is just the sort that runs away and has romantic thrills over silly stories as if they were real."

"And sometimes," said Rose, with more shrewdness than her brother always gave her credit for, "sometimes such girls have romantic thrills over actual people."

"I suppose they do," he said it gravely and then turned the talk to his plans for the coming Sunday.

"I think Brother Noyes will accept our invitation to take the evening service, or at least share it with us. We vote on it at our meeting tomorrow evening. If Brother Allen doesn't have a change of heart our people will invite the Methodists to come over."

"You really plan to appear next Sunday looking like that?"

"How else can I look? There isn't time to grow a set of new eyebrows in three days."

"You don't look right. You look−−you look−−awful funny."

"Perhaps I can live it down," he said, with a grin. But he got up, went into his room, and looked at himself in the glass again.

When he came out he was looking so grave that Rose exclaimed:

"You see, Howard! It won't do. Really, it won't. Get Brother Noyes to take your services. Let him preach for you morning and evening."

"No, I can't do that, Rose. Why, I've got a sermon in my system out of to−night's experience that I must get out or I'll blow up. Besides, I don't want to risk brother Noyes' theology on my congregation. I don't know that I can stand for it. And I do need some punishment for my vanity. You don't know me. Sister, I am going to preach Sunday morning, eyebrows or no eyebrows."

She knew him well enough not to protest or argue, but when the morning came and Howard had a daylight view of himself, the effect of it on himself was so startling that he almost regretted his statement made to his sister, and was half−minded to take her advice and go and ask Brother Noyes to take both his services.

But when he ventured about noon to go out on the street to the post office, found that he was the talk of the town.

The Expressman had backed his wagon up against the platform waiting for number ten. The Agent had just pulled the semaphore down for clear and was sitting at his open window near the edge of the platform.

"That was a great stunt Mr. Chase got off last night, eh?" said the Agent as the Expressman looked in the window.

"Well I should say. He was the hull show, and then some. They say he yanked Jake Seymour clean out of his little booth in the Cozy and throwed him clean across the street into Sam Green's drug store."

"And he landed right under the sody fountain, so all they had to do when he opened his mouth and moaned for water was to turn the faucet," said the Agent as he got up to sell a ticket.

When he came back the Expressman was saying, "I hear his mustache and eyebrows was burnt clean off by the explosion and he may lose his eyesight. I hope it 'tain't so. I'd hate to have anything like that happen to Mr. Chase."

"He must a−given you a dollar for takin' his trunk up to the parsonage," said the Agent, grinning. "But that can't be true about the mustache, for Mr. Chase didn't have any."

"Come to think you're right about that," said the Expressman meditatively. "But he had eyebrows. Everybody has them. That is, most everybody," he added, looking with squint eye at the Agent, who was red−headed and had eyebrows of the almost invisible pink variety.

The Agent looked at the Expressman with a stony glare.

"Some people prefer alfalfa whiskers to eyebrows. It's been an awful dry dusty season for some crops," the Agent said with his gaze on the Expressman's upper lip, which was adorned or festooned with an unusually withered and untrimmed mustache.

"Yes, so I have heard," said the Expressman, unmoved. "Say, have you caught the word going around? All the girls are just crazy over Mr. Chase. They all think he's the Apollos Belle something. They all want to get him. From what I hear—−"

"This is the most gossipy town in Kansas," said the Agent, as he rose to sell another ticket.

When he came back to his seat by the window, the Expressman said, thoughtfully:

"The men seem to be as bad as the women in Red Hill for gossip."

"Worse," said the Agent, opening his key for Lawton to ask for No. 10.

"Yes, I dunno but you're right. I always said if anybody went wrong in Red Hill some man would tell it first. But I feel kind a−worried about Mr. Chase. I'd hate to see anything happen—−"

"He can take care of himself," said the Agent, interrupting.

"Yes, but can he take care of other folks? That's the question. Now, about these crazy girls−−I was saying

yesterday to Bill Thompson—−"

But the Agent did not get what the Expressman said to Bill Thompson, because he had to go out and check a trunk, and after No. 10 came in the Expressman had a little business that took him away.

When Howard opened his mail that No. 10 brought from the west he was delighted to find a letter from his Seminary classmate, Roy Lennox. He came out of his study into the kitchen to read to his sister.

"He and Kate will be here next week. He writes−−`Get your best room ready for next Friday. We will arrive on No. 10. Don't forget the three−story apple pies you promised me. Is there any prospect of that assistant pastorate we talked about? Affectionately, Roy and Kate.'"

"We'll have a great time. I've missed the old fellow dreadfully. There's a number of things I want to talk over with him."

Howard went back to his work with a glow of anticipation as he thought over his chum's arrival.

That evening, at the church prayer meeting, the question of inviting the Methodists to use the building part of the time on Sunday was stated by Howard with great frankness and to his pleasant surprise, with almost no discussion, the people voted unanimously to invite the Methodists to join in their services while they were without a house of worship.

Howard went right over the next morning to see Brother Noyes.

Noyes was grateful and expressed himself fittingly. He also agreed with Howard that they invite a general community meeting of all the churches to attend the evening services during the summer.

"Our yard is the largest and best," said Howard. "I'll get busy and put up the platform, get out the dodgers and you do the preaching next Sunday. The rest of us will pray or sing or take up the collection or whatever you say."

"All right." Noyes laughed at Chase's enthusiasm. But he had yet to learn that when Howard once did a thing, even against his own personal wishes and ambition, he threw all regret to the wind.

"How about the collection?" Brother Noyes said.

"We'll divide it up equally," Howard replied promptly.

"Only taking out your part for expenses in lighting, and so forth," said Noyes.

"Agreed." Howard was pleasantly surprised. "Suppose we outline the dodgers now."

They drafted a copy and Howard, after a few changes, got up to go, saying, "We ought to have a great crowd."

"I'm sure we would if you were going to preach," said Noyes with a laugh.

"We will anyhow. You see. The only trouble will be to get seats enough."

"I believe we can furnish some chairs out of our wreck. And by the way, Brother Chase, I believe some of the lumber from your platform blew into our yard. At any rate, go and help yourself to any lumber there you can use. It will save buying."

"I'll do it," Howard said promptly, as he went out.

All that afternoon he worked with the help of a volunteer committee of men representing both churches, putting up the platform, stringing his wires and getting lumber and seats from the ruin in the M. E. Church yard.

But first he went directly from Brother Noyes over to Clark's with his copy for the dodger.

Inez' father was in the back of the room and she was sitting on her high seat at the case.

He went directly up to the case and began at once to tell Inez how he wanted the dodgers printed. He had, in the excitement of his planning, forgotten all about his own looks. But Inez exclaimed:

"You did get hurt, Mr. Chase, last night!"

"Only in my feelings. Lost some of my good looks, that's all." He laughed and Inez joined feebly. But Howard rather sharply came back to the dodgers.

"It's a hurry job, I know, Miss Clark. But I want them not later than tomorrow morning. Here it is Friday. Can you do them for me?"

"Yes. I guess so." Inez looked over the copy. "I can get the proof for you to−night. Shall I bring it over to you? Or will you correct it here?"

"If you could bring it over—−" Howard spoke carelessly. "I shall be very busy this afternoon and evening."

"I'll be at the parsonage by eight or nine," Inez said.

Howard thanked her, took off his hat, bowed gravely, and went out in his abrupt fashion. Just as he turned he almost collided with Mrs. Wilson, who had just come in. The door had been standing open.

He said good morning to her. She returned his greeting and asked Inez for a copy of the paper.

"It's not ready yet, Mrs. Wilson."

"But you go to press this morning, don't you?" said Mrs. Wilson sharply. "I want to see that advertisement I sent in of my lost hand bag."

"We are behind on the paper this week," Inez replied. "The storm spoiled some of our paper. We had to send to Lawton for a supply."

Mrs. Wilson looked at Inez with a look of suspicion and disapproval. Then she went to the door and gazed at Howard's retreating form. Then she turned and looked again at Inez, who had turned to her case and was beginning on the dodger. After a moment she shook her head slowly and went away. Inez did not look at her. But as she went on with her type−setting a red spot burned feverishly on her cheeks.

Howard worked all the afternoon like four men and got up his wires and platform and filled the yard with all the pews he could pull out of the Methodist church wreckage.

After supper he went into his little study and began to work on his Sunday morning sermon.

He had been sitting there only a few minutes when Rose came in.

"I may go out a little while over to the church to rehearse with Agnes."

"Oh, all right. If any one calls before you go, don't disturb me unless it's very important. I've got to shut myself in here all night. Oh, I forget. Miss Clark is coming over with the proof of the Sunday night dodger. I must see that."

Rose stopped in the doorway.

"Coming over with the proof—−"

"Yes," replied her brother. He was already in one of his absent−minded moods his sister knew so well.

She looked at him gravely, and went out into the sitting−room, put on her hat, and went out of the house.

Fifteen minutes later she returned. If Howard had not been so deeply buried in his own thought he would have detected two women's voices as Rose came back into the sitting−room.

The little clock on his desk said seven−thirty.

Up the street on her porch, half a block from the parsonage, sat Mrs. Wilson, watching the street. A light on the corner illuminated a part of the parsonage and church.

The woman on the porch leaned forward eagerly and her eye gleamed.

A girl was going up the walk. She turned in at the parsonage gate and went up the steps.

It was Inez. Mrs. Wilson watched her as she went up to the door. She was there at the door only a moment. It opened and she went in. The woman on the porch sat back with a sigh of satisfaction.

CHAPTER V.

The minute Inez entered the parsonage and shut the door she found herself face to face with Rose. And as she took a step into the room she confronted Miss Burton, who was seated at the piano.

Rose said quietly, "You have come with the proof of the dodger. If you will give it to me I will take it into my brother."

Inez, without a word, handed the proof over and Rose took it and went into Howard's study, closing the door.

Inez remained standing in the middle of the room, looking at Miss Burton. They could hear the low sound of voices in the other room.

"Did you have to come here, Inez?"

"Yes, I did. How about you?"

"I came because Miss Chase invited me," said Miss Burton, colouring a little.

"And I came because Mr. Chase invited me," said Inez, a little defiantly.

"Invited you?"

"I brought over the proof he wanted. Is there anything wrong about that?"

"No, perhaps not. But after what you told me—−"

Inez came over and sat down by Miss Burton. She seemed greatly disturbed as she spoke hurriedly.

"I told you I was afraid I would get him into trouble. But I wouldn't do it for the world. I think too much of him."

"Hush!" said Miss Burton, and she added, almost sternly, "Inez, we can't talk here, but you must remember what a gossippy town Red Hill is—−"

Inez was listening, her face pale, her lips trembling, her eyes on the door into the minister's study.

"I know," she said, "it's the worst place in Kansas for gossip. But I wasn't doing any harm. I just wanted to see him. I was hungry to see him. Help me to go away, won't you, Miss Burton, before I—−"

Miss Burton put out a hand and laid it on the girl's arm. Inez was trembling like some hunted creature.

In the little study Howard was going over the proof, making a few corrections, rapidly.

When Rose came in she had gone up to his desk and said:

"Here's the proof of your dodger Miss Clark brought."

"Oh, all right," said Howard, absently, as if still removed in abstraction from his surroundings. His sister laid the paper on his desk in front of him. He looked at it with a start and exclaimed, "Oh!"

"Yes. And she's waiting for you to correct it."

"Waiting?"

"In the sitting−room. She's visiting with Miss Burton."

"Miss Burton?"

"Yes, I asked her over to spend the evening going over the music. It won't disturb you, will it, if we practice?"

"No."

He began to make his corrections on the proof and when he was through he looked up at his sister.

"Did you invite Miss Burton over because—−"

"Yes. Howard, I don't believe you begin to understand what a wicked world this is. You are so good yourself, so free from any thought of evil that even if you are a minister and make a business of preaching to others, you are like a child in some things, and when it comes to women, you know nothing."

He did not answer her, only looked up from where he sat, his great dark eyes taking on a deeper hue, the lines in his mouth straightening out, his face expressing his feeling for his sister's thought of him and more than that, his own real knowledge of her purpose. And silently he reached up a long arm, drew her down to him and kissed her.

When Rose came back into the sitting−room Inez got up and took the proof and turned to the door.

"We will send the copies over in the morning so Mr. Chase can get them in time to distribute. Will you tell him?"

"Yes. He said six hundred copies would be enough?"

"He needn't call for them. We'll see that he gets them."

Inez said it as if she were bidding farewell to something. But to Rose's surprise she sat for several minutes talking with Miss Burton about the scene at the fire before she finally went away.

Mrs. Wilson, over on her porch, waited what she thought was a long time for Inez to come out of the parsonage. Then she went into the house, put on her hat, came out, and went up the street a block, crossed over and knocked at the door of a house on the corner.

A large woman came to the door.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Wilson. Come in. Come in."

Mrs. Wilson came in and brought with her the air of communicative eagerness that she knew would be welcome with her neighbour.

"I've a great piece of news, Mrs. Gale. You wouldn't guess it in a month."

"Something about the new minister?" asked Mrs. Gale shrewdly. She had hitched her chair up close to Mrs. Wilson's and the two women continued their talk in low but intimate voices.

Mrs. Wilson looked somewhat disconcerted.

"Well, yes, it *about the new minister, but it's about another person, too."*

"You don't mean—−"

"Yes."

"What?"

"You don't know, after all?"

"Know what?"

"The other person."

"Is there another person?"

"There always is."

"But you wouldn't expect in so short a time—−"

"What has that to do with it? Mrs. Gale, if people knew what I know and could see what I have seen−−: You remember that young minister the Presbyterians had some six−−no eight years ago this fall, how in less than four weeks we found−−you remember—−"

Mrs. Gale nodded her big head vigorously to indicate that she remembered. And she had good reason to remember, for the scandal created about the young preacher came very near ruining his career at the very start.

"Well, I've found out a thing about Mr. Chase that will make some folks change their minds about him. Why, almost the first time I saw him I said to Mr. Wilson, `The girls will all be running after him.' And it's true."

"You don't mean—−" Mrs. Gale leaned forward an eager look on her face, her eyes gleaming, her hands clutching the sides of her chair. "You don't mean—−"

"Of course," Mrs. Wilson continued, ignoring Mrs. Gale's anxiety to know what Mrs. Wilson did mean. "Of course I don't wish Mr. Chase any ill, but—−"

"But what?" Mrs. Gale asked, as Mrs. Wilson made an impressive pause.

"Never mind. If folks only knew what I know—−"

"Well, what *you know?" Mrs. Gale lost her patience and put the question pointedly.*

Mrs. Wilson drew her chair up a little nearer her neighbour's and dropped her voice still lower.

"You know Inez Clark?"

"Every one does."

"Of course. Everybody here in Red Hill has to know everybody," said Mrs. Wilson fretfully. "But I didn't mean that. Do you know what kind of a girl she is?"

"No, not specially. I see her at the movies every time I go. I suppose she's like most of the girls in Red Hill."

"She's different." Mrs. Wilson said it impressively. "She's different. I said over a year ago to Mr. Wilson, `That girl will make trouble for some young man some time.'"

"But isn't that what all of 'em do?" Mrs. Gale interrupted with unexpected shrewdness.

"Not like Inez," Mrs. Wilson said solemnly. The subject was not to be trifled with. "Inez is different. She isn't like the other girls. She's secretive. She won't talk. I've tried to get her to tell me about her father's invention, but you can't get anything out of her."

Mrs. Gale listened with commendable patience. But when Mrs. Wilson paused for breath she interjected the

question.

"But what has that to do with Mr. Chase?"

"Everything. You wouldn't suspect to look at him that a girl like Inez Clark would—−"

"She's very pretty," interrupted Mrs. Gale.

"Maybe she is. But−−well, I wouldn't have believed it myself if I hadn't heard it and seen it."

"Heard and seen what!" exclaimed Mrs. Gale.

"What I heard and saw. You see I was sitting on my porch to−night, about eight or half−past, half−past, I think it was, when who should come up the street towards the Congregational parsonage but Inez Clark."

"How could you tell?"

"Well, the street light is right across from Dr. Vaughn's, you know. And besides, there isn't a girl in town walks like Inez. She almost runs. It's a very peculiar walk."

Mrs. Gale nodded as if agreeing.

"And besides," continued Mrs. Wilson, mysteriously, "I had reason to know that she was coming to the parsonage about that hour."

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Gale, her big eyes gleaming eagerly.

"Yes. I heard her say herself—−But that is later. She went right up to the parsonage and went in."

"Who opened the door?"

"I couldn't see," Mrs. Wilson acknowledged the unfortunate fact reluctantly. "But she hadn't been in the house long before she went into the study. You know the study is right at the corner and Mr. Chase's desk is right up between two windows. I noticed it when I went in one day they were getting it ready for him."

"Well, it seems just awful, but in less than five minutes after Inez went in there, Mr. Chase put his arm around her and drew her right down into his lap."

"What!" Mrs. Gale exclaimed, the unexpected suddenness of the statement colliding with the enjoyment she was experiencing over Mrs. Wilson's revelation.

"Isn't it just awful. But the shadows on the curtains were very plain. I remember telling Mrs. Burton while she was getting those curtains, I was in the store that day. I said to her, `Mrs. Burton, that curtain stuff is pretty thin. It will show right through.' She said it was for the study and was thick enough. Mrs. Burton is a woman you can't argue with, so I didn't say any more, but I remember I said to Mr. Wilson I thought the Ladies' Aid of the Congregational Church was skimping a good deal on the parsonage furnishings."

"But about Inez," Mrs. Gale said. "You feel sure, sure, it was her."

"Why I *it was. I heard her tell Mr. Chase she would be at the parsonage by eight or nine."*

" heard her tell him?" Mrs. Gale said incredulously.

"I was going into the office this morning to get a paper and Mr. Chase and Inez were close together up by the type case. They seemed to be a good deal confused as I came in. I thought at the time it was a queer thing for a girl to say. But I heard her say it plain enough. Isn't it awful?"

"Awful," Mrs. Gale said like a big echo.

"If the people of this town knew what we know, Mrs. Gale−−well, I don't know what would happen. But it would create a sensation, all right."

"It surely would," Mrs. Gale nodded her big head vigorously. And then she added, with a downward look, "Of course, it won't go any further."

"Of course not," Mrs. Wilson exclaimed indignantly. "We don't want to make trouble for Mr. Chase. But I think it's awful about Inez."

"Yes, awful," Mrs. Gale assented, as her visitor rose to go. "But these pretty girls are always—−"

"Yes, they are—−" Mrs. Wilson said as she went out.

Saturday was a busy day in Red Hill. The farmers came in to do their shopping and exchange political views. The street was lined with automobiles and buggies. By noon the main business thoroughfare presented a bustling appearance "looks like K. C.," as the Expressman said to a farmer acquaintance.

"Were you ever in K. C?" asked the farmer.

"Sure!" answered the Expressman. "I went down last Christmas to the Grand Opery."

"I didn't know you sang," said his farmer acquaintance.

"I don't unless I'm paid opery prices," said the Expressman.

Just then a boy came down the crowded sidewalk distributing dodgers. The Expressman held out his hand for one, as the boy went by.

"It's a notice of the union meeting at the Congregational Church Sunday night," said the boy. "Everybody's going."

"If everybody goes who didn't go last Sunday night there will be a crowd," said the farmer. "All the folks in our district planned to drive over if the storm hadn't come up."

"Elder Noyes is going to preach," said the expressman, as he read the dodger. "He's a pretty good preacher, but he can't say Amen to Mr. Chase. None of 'em can. He's smart, he is. I came pretty near joining the church first time I heard him. He's got a mighty takin' way with him. If he had my job there wouldn't be another express wagon in town. Folks would lose their trains just to wait for him to come when he'd forgot to put it on the slate. But, say"−−he dropped his voice, and slowly pulled at his scraggy moustache as he looked around and edged over a little nearer the young farmer−−"say, have you heard the story that's going around about Mr. Chase and—−" Here his voice dropped so that the farmer had to bend his head to hear.

"You don't say." His eye gleamed with interest.

"I don't say it's true. But it's going the rounds."

"I didn't know he was that sort," the young farmer grinned, and his face showed eager interest. "Why, he hasn't been here three weeks."

"I don't say it's true," the expressman insisted, with some feeling. "I like Mr. Chase. Everybody likes him. You ought to have heard the talk on the street day after Jake Seymour was blown out of the Cozy. Why, Mr. Chase made no more of carrying him across there to Meyer's Drug Store than if he had been a empty suit case. I'd a had to put skids under Jake and back the wagon up to the sidewalk and take out the tail board before I could load him in. But Mr. Chase, he just took him up with one hand just as easy as−−as−−lying."

"You're sure you're telling the truth about this other matter?" said the farmer, as he started to move along.

"No, I don't say it's true," protested the Expressman. "I only say it's going round. I can't believe it's true. But you never can tell. A good many of these smart fellows has somethin' queer about 'em. But folks can't help likin' him. I took to him before he put his foot on the platform. I'd hate to see him get into trouble."

But the young farmer was already down the street, retailing what he had heard to groups of young and old farmers, who listened with eager ears and gleaming eyes, for exciting news was scarce in Red Hill and "this young preacher Chase" seemed destined to prove a Godsend to the new desert of Red Hill and vicinity, to judge from the hungry and thirsty minds that feasted on the story that was "going 'round."

Howard had been going down on the street during the two Saturdays since he arrived in Red Hill. He loved a crowd. He had mixed eagerly with the farmers, being introduced to them by his own church members as he met them. And with that attraction which men like the Expressman felt without being able to define it, he had drawn men to him. There was an irresistible charm in his ready grin, in his complete absence of ministerial manner, in his complete and absolute love of humanity and passion for democracy. Is it any wonder poor Inez bent to him as if a breath from some invisible zephyr had dropped over her and bent her frail blossom to nod trembling as he passed her? Results that with others required weeks and months for ripening, with him were accomplished with swift hastening steps. He acted on people as a tonic and created friendship with a passing smile, making important history with amazing rapidity.

But this Saturday before the Sunday which was to begin the union evening services from which he began to anticipate some great results, he did not go down town, but spent the time between his little study and the church yard.

His disfigured looks were, he told himself, partly to blame for his shrinking from the public. He said to himself, with real honesty, the clear, transparent sort which a man uses on himself as well as on other people, "I am, when you come to look at me a fright. I can tell that the minute I catch sight of myself in a window pane, to say nothing of a mirror. It is useless to deny I have always been a little proud of my looks. It is partly joy at being well and strong, but some of it is just pride, sheer pride, no matter what Rose says. I am beginning already to think of how I will feel when I have to face the people to−morrow morning. It will be something of an ordeal. And I know it will be humiliating until I get to preaching and perhaps even after that."

He had a number of details to attend to in connection with his services and with the seating of the yard. While he was at work in his study in the forenoon, Rose brought in the dodgers which Inez had sent over by one of the

boys in the neighbourhood who belonged to the Sunday School.

Howard at once invited him to go out on the street and distribute the circulars, getting some other boys to help, and also had him leave some at Deacon Burton's store to give out to his many farmer customers to take out to the farms with them. He called up Brother Noyes and asked him to call up Gray and Harris and ask them to take some part in the evening meeting, and then he shut himself into his little room to give his undivided thought to his morning sermon, which had for its theme, "Paul, the Man of One Idea."

When he came out at one o'clock to get a little lunch, Rose gently rallied him on his looks.

"Honest, Howard, you do not look fit to go into the pulpit Sunday. Look at yourself in the glass and you'll see what the people will have to look at."

"I've stopped looking in the glass since the fire. You'll have to comb my hair for me. But I'm going into the pulpit to−morrow. It will be quite a shock to them, I know, but they'll get over it."

"But you look awful funny without eyebrows."

"And yet it's no joke," he said gravely. "Perhaps if I'm no better next Sunday I'll let Roy preach for me. Isn't it jolly to know he and Kate are coming?"

"Yes. I'm glad for your sake that Roy is coming. I don't know his wife."

"She's just as nice as he is. They're both used to luxuries, but they are like children in their enjoyment of simple things. I hope they can stay a long time."

He spent the afternoon going over his sermon and helping to complete the final arrangements for his outdoor service. He had rearranged the seats so as to allow of more space in front of the door and he ran a few electric lights out across the road so that people who came in their autos would feel they were more a part of the audience in the yard.

After supper he turned to Rose, who had gone into the kitchen for something.

"Now it's dark and I'm as good−looking as any one. I'll go over and see how Jake Seymour is. I'll not be out long."

Seymour lived across the Santa Fe tracks on the other side of Red Hill. Howard had already been to see him to make inquiry about his injuries, but at the time of his call he had been asleep and the man who came to the door had said it was the doctor's orders not to excite him with company. Howard had learned that the man at the door was Seymour's brother and that the two lived together in the small house, keeping "bachelor's" quarters. Seymour's brother being a brakeman on the Santa Fe with a run to Newton, getting home at irregular intervals.

"As soon as he's able to see any one he'll want to see you, sure, Mr. Chase. Come again. If he's any worse I'll let you know."

To−night, when Howard knocked at the door, the Agent opened it.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Chase. Come in. Jake's getting on fine. He wants to see you."

Howard went in, seeing everything and seeming to see nothing{sic}He found Jake Seymour sitting up, his head bandaged and a general air of being blown up about his person, but on the sure road to recovery and ready to express his thankfulness to Howard for his part on the night of the accident.

"I thought I was done for, sure, and the End was on my film. But I'm glad to be alive, Mr. Chase, and I'm grateful to you. I don't know how to express myself any better."

Howard was surprised at the man's language and the evident marks of his culture and education. Seymour was a very large, awkwardly built man, with a plain, common−looking face, but a good brow and a clear, bright eye. Howard liked him and in his usual enthusiastic manner proceeded to get at his real aim in life.

"I want to know about the films I mean about your part in them. When you get able to talk matters over I want you to give me inside information about your exchange, the source of your supply, the chances for bettering the shows, and so forth."

Jake Seymour leaned forward in bed and gave Howard a look of real interest.

"Say, you're the first preacher in this town ever talked like that to me. They're always blaming me for the character of the shows. I can tell you a lot of things about the business. I'm just as much interested as you are in getting good films. But I have to take what they send me. Many a time I don't see the fool thing till it's wobbling over the screen. And I've put my hand over the shutter more than once to cut off something I knew was coming that the kids ought not to see. I'll be awful glad to talk it over with some one who has sense and understands."

Howard's eyes glowed with eager interest.

"When you're able to talk we'll have a great time. We'll get the Agent here to write a scenario with a railroad thriller in it that will be the real thing. `Santa Fe all the way,' and work in the moral without any foolishness. I know the Agent could do it in fine style."

The Agent actually blushed, so that his pink eyebrows were nearly as invisible as Howard's.

"I don't know but he could do it, all right," Jake Seymour grinned. "Perhaps you don't know, Mr. Chase, but in between setting the signals, selling tickets and opening the key to Lawton, he's leaning *literachure. I've seen some of his `pieces' and they ain't half bad."*

The Agent blushed redder than ever.

"He's kiddin' you, Mr. Chase. I've never broke into print yet. Looks as if the semaphore was always set for me to slow down and stop."

Howard was delighted. It seemed to him that every day he was discovering some new and interesting types in Red Hill. He had not suspected the Agent.

"Some day when you're not busy, come up to the parsonage and let me see some of your stuff. I've been practising some myself on the magazines, and I believe either of us could beat some of the matter they print. Come on up sometime."

"I'll do it, Mr. Chase. I believe I could get one of my pieces into Munsey's *if I could lick it into shape."*

"I'm sure you could. If I was the editor I'd pay three cents a mile for it." Howard grinned and the Agent and Seymour joined in a loud laugh, as Howard rose to go.

"You got hurt yourself, Mr. Chase," Seymour suddenly said, with gravity, and with marked delicacy, not seeming to call attention directly to the remarkable absence of eyebrows.

"Only some of my beauty rubbed off. I'm hoping it will grow on again."

He shook hands with Seymour and the Agent and went out with his swift, but not noisy manner.

After he was gone, the Agent sat silently staring at Seymour. He had come over to sit with the moving picture man until his brother came in on the Newton freight.

"He's a fine fellow," said Seymour at last. "Never thought I should ever owe my life to a preacher."

"Yes," said the Agent slowly and in a low tone, "And doesn't it seem a pity, if it's true, what's going the rounds?"

"What's that?" asked Seymour, sitting up and his face took on an eager look.

"Haven't you heard? The Expressman told me this afternoon. It's all over town. He and Inez Clark—−"

Here the Agent dropped his voice still lower and leaned over the bed as he finished his sentence.

"I don't believe it," said Seymour, throwing a big fist down on his bed cover. "Don't believe Mr. Chase is that kind of a man."

"Well, I don't, either. But it's going the rounds," said the Agent slowly.

Late that night Howard finished his sermon. And leaning his elbows on his desk, he looked up at the picture of Christ which Roy Lennox had given him.

Red Hill was asleep. The last farmer had driven out. The soft prairie night wind blew through the little porch at the end of the house, bringing with it a scent of ripening grain and heavy, rich earth odour and fruit blossoms.

He looked at the picture with his gaze absorbed and his whole person removed from his surroundings. If he had been born in India, he would have understood the mystic and the trance dreamer. Yet no one so wide awake and earth−born and earth−interested as he.

There in the night quiet, as he sat detached from all his surroundings, his mind was moving forward to his morning service, his vision outlined the audience, his heart longed for a visible response to his message, his whole passionate desire breathed the longing for real results in his hearer's lives, and as he gazed at the Christ it seemed to him he was going to have his prayer answered.

"Why should I wait any length of time in my ministry before I win souls? Why may I not get results to−morrow?"

It was only one phase of his rapidly moving nature that spoke the wish of his heart to his Lord. Body, mind, will, emotions, sentiment, spiritual longing in him were restless under restraint. His was not one of the slow−moving patient, waiting souls but rather one insistent eager to see results in his young manhood, ready to reap the harvest on the evening of the very day he had sown the seed.

Later on, if some reverent spirit had been allowed to look into the study, it would have seen the new minister

of Red Hill kneeling by his desk, his head on his hands, praying out of a wide−awake spirit for a Pentecostal Lord's Day.

Sunday morning dawned over Red Hill a perfect June day, and when Howard stood up to preach he faced a congregation and a condition of human interest without a parallel in that little Kansas town.

It was like his first Sunday, only twice as many people. Farmers' automobiles lined the road, people stood outside eagerly trying to get a look through the open windows and an air of expectant interest greeted Howard at the very outset of the service.

And yet, in spite of the fact that his preaching was unlike anything the people had ever heard and his prayer at the close made the audience sit in painful hushed attention, the result was altogether disappointing.

He said to Rose after it was all over and they were back in the parsonage for dinner:

"I don't know what the matter is. But I didn't get anywhere to−day. Something wrong somewhere."

Rose did not answer at once.

"I think you are tired. But the people may have been affected by your looks. Did that trouble you?"

"No. I forgot all about that. Do you think the people let it get in the way of my message?"

"No. You silly boy, don't you realise they came in a crowd to−day to see the hero who threw Jake Seymour across the street with one hand? That's what `swelled the audience,' as the papers say. The absence of your eyebrows was the public proof of your heroism."

"`Heroism!'" he exclaimed. "If I thought anything like that brought the people to church—−"

His horror of cheap claptrap, of sensation, or running after the latest fad caused a feeling like disgust and dislike of humanity. He was too sane and healthy of spirit to allow such a mental attitude to prevail, but he could not shake the feeling off and it followed him throughout the day and into the evening service.

The crowd at that service broke all records for church attendance in Red Hill. The evening was perfect. Elder Noyes preached what he called an oldfashioned gospel sermon. The young people under Miss Burton's direction sang with spirit and evidently pleased the crowd, the other ministers took their parts acceptably and under any ordinary conditions Howard would have called the evening a great success and gone on to plan with enthusiasm for the future.

But he came into the parsonage after the people were gone and the lights all out, looking and feeling more depressed than Rose had ever seen him. For he was a stranger to "moods" and his uniformity of cheerfulness and evenness of temper were his peculiar characteristics.

"Something gone wrong to−day and I can't lay it to my eyebrows," he grinned, but not in his usual careless fashion. "We got no results either morning or evening."

"Only the crowds," said Rose, trying to cheer him up.

"Crowds! What are they? What use is a crowd if it doesn't do something, commit itself, take a stand, change its habits? A crowd does not mean anything, sister, to me unless it does something more than come to a meeting. It must not only come it must , *and go in some real positive conscious way, or all preaching and meetings are empty things. And that is what ours was to−day. And did it seem to you that the ministers were rather cold and unfriendly?"*

"Why, no. You must have imagined it. They seemed friendly enough to me."

"I must be tired and imagined it. But it seemed to me they acted a little queer. You know I'm sensitive on that point. I want people to like me. I like to be liked."

"And you *liked. Howard, do you realise that in the few short weeks you have been here you have won the people? Mrs. Burton said to−day she never saw anything like it. The people just can't help liking you."*

"Is that so?" he laughed liked a boy, but he was immensely pleased.

"I can go to sleep on that, little sister, but somehow the day was not a success. Let's forget it, and try again. I did my praying all alone. I'll get the other men to join me before next Sunday."

But when morning came and he began his week's work, he felt an unusual depression as if an intangible something was in the air. He went down town and people greeted him as usual and spoke of the great Sunday meetings, but he felt an unspoken reserve or difference in manner, which annoyed and disturbed him mentally, because he could not define it to himself. Even Deacon Burton did not seem quite the same when Howard stepped into the store on his way back from the post office. And Deacon Burton was fast winning a very warm place in the young minister's heart.

Under any ordinary circumstances he would, acting on his absolutely frank and undiplomatic nature, have gone at the heart of the trouble and tried to find out the reason. But he decided it was a case of unusual "tired" or something left over from his moving picture night experience, or possibly people were embarrassed on account of his looks; yes, that must be it, he ginned, and resolutely set himself to dismiss the whole thing and go at his work in his usual vigorous fashion, getting ready also for his classmate's arrival and so the week passed with no special incident until Lennox and his wife arrived on Friday.

Rose and Howard were down at the station to meet them so they wouldn't "get lost among the population," as Howard reminded Roy, and they escorted them up to the parsonage and rejoiced to see them installed in the best room with a promise to stay for an indefinite visit.

Howard had not seen Inez since he saw her in the chorus on Sunday, and Rose had been to the printer's with his copy and secured the dodgers, doing it under the guise of helping him while he was busy with his chum, and so forth. The Rev. Mr. Gray was to be the preacher and the circulars printed rather a full programme of special music.

Saturday Howard spent busily with Lennox in preparation for the Sunday meetings, going over his plans with his Seminary classmate, who showed the greatest enthusiasm in everything.

"I believe there's work enough here for two men," Lennox said, as he watched Howard pull benches around the yard, screw electric lamps into new connections, reconstruct a part of the platform to give the chorus more room, and go from one thing to another with a quiet swiftness that looked easy, but was in reality the price of constant and untiring practice.

"I've had my hands full ever since I came," Howard replied, with a cheerful smile. "Not a dull minute. After supper I'll take you down to see the man who's responsible for my lost eyebrows. This is an exciting parish."

Late that night, after he and Roy had come back from an interesting visit with Seymour, and after the others had retired and Howard was alone in his study, a quiet knock at the door brought him out into the little sitting−room. Evidently he had not heard or paid attention to the first nock, for as he was about to open the door the rap was repeated, and when the door opened, Deacon Burton was seen there on the little porch.

He stepped in and greeted Howard gravely.

"I want to see you alone, Brother Chase."

"Come into the study," Howard said, surprised, but calm as he always was inwardly.

Deacon Burton went in and Howard closed the door.

The deacon laid his hat down slowly on the little table by Howard's desk and taking the seat offered him he sat down and looked earnestly, and Howard thought, sorrowfully into his pastor's face. He was totally in the dark as to the object of the deacon's call. But he sat there facing him with a fast growing conviction that something like a tremendous event was about to happen, or that a crisis of some great and impending meaning had suddenly come upon him.

The soft June night was very quiet about the house and the two men in the minister's study.

CHAPTER VI

Brother Chase," said Deacon Burton slowly and gravely, "I have come to talk with you plainly, and I believe you will understand why. Let me say, first of all, I have no motive in coming here tonight except my love for the church and my great, may I say, affectionate regard for you as my pastor."

"I understand that," said Howard, eagerly. "I have the same feeling for the church and for you." Deacon Burton regarded him earnestly.

"I want to believe that. What I have to say is all the more painful on that account. Do you know about the report going around the town about yourself and this girl Inez Clark?"

The question was so blunt, so direct and so unexpected that Howard, who had been leaning forward towards the deacon, fell back in his chair as if the deacon had struck him. His face was pale, his hands were clenched, and he was silent. Then he said, very slowly, as if holding himself in check:

"No, Deacon Burton, I have heard nothing. This is the first—−"

And then he paused with a hesitation so curious that Deacon Burton looked at him with a troubled look.

"Of course, I have lived here long enough to know that Red Hill is notorious for its gossipping habits. That is what made me slow about coming to you with this story. But it is so prevalent, it is, I am grieved to say, so generally credited, that I felt, as an officer of the church and−−and−−one at heart anxious for your welfare, that I ought to come to you direct and see why you did not deny the story if you had heard it and to find out the real truth about it, if you had not."

"I don't know what you are talking about," Howard said, with his usual frank straightforwardness. "I have not been charged with anything. How can I deny a thing I have never heard?"

Deacon Burton looked at his young pastor thoughtfully.

"Do you mean you have not heard what the whole town is talking about?"

The deacon eyed him curiously and closely, then his face cleared and he breathed a long deep breath as if his mind were greatly relieved.

"I don't believe you can look me in the face like that and say anything less than the truth. I haven't lived in this town nearly all my life without learning that sometimes the person most talked about is the last one to hear about it. I am going to tell you plainly the story that is going the rounds. It will then remain for you to decide what you ought to do."

Deacon Burton went on then to tell in a very plain, direct way the story Mrs. Wilson had told Mrs. Gale, with several additions such as generally accumulate around the original setting.

When he was through, Howard, who had listened gravely, but not with any signs of deep embarrassment, simply said, "Deacon Burton, if this thing you have told me did not reveal a condition of mind in this town that is a moral tragedy it would be so laughable that I ought not to pay any attention to it. But of course, I understand what it might mean to me and to the church to keep still about it. Fortunately, I can easily prove that the story has no foundation, only of course we must take into account the poor girl. I—−" And at that point, to the good deacon's uneasiness, Howard paused in real embarrassment, as if something had suddenly occurred to him that entered into the situation to complicate an otherwise rather simple problem.

"How can you prove to the community that this story is false?" the deacon asked, coming back to the main point and putting the question as if to fortify his faith in his pastor against a possible doubt which his manner had raised in his mind.

Howard at once became alert and revealed his wideawake attitude as he answered:

"The night Miss Clark called here with the proof of our Sunday evening dodger, a week ago Friday, I was here in the study alone. My sister brought the proof in here to me, I corrected it and she took it out there into the sitting−room. Miss Clark did not come in here, and I never saw her."

"So that you two, your sister and yourself, can testify that this story going the rounds is false. That is enough for me, it is impossible for me to believe such a thing of you, but, Mr. Chase, I am sorry to say there are people in Red Hill, and I fear even some in our church who would say you and your sister were−−were—−"

Howard impulsively jumped up.

"Do you mean to tell me, Deacon Burton, that there are people in this town who would not believe my sister's word when she was speaking the solemn truth?"

Deacon Burton eyed him sorrowfully.

"Brother Chase, I am an older man than you are, and I have seen more human nature, as you called it in you sermon last Sunday, than you have. And I have to believe that a community which is evil−minded enough to gossip about everybody as ours is, is also evil−minded enough to judge other people wrongfully. You must remember that Red Hill has not known you very long. You have not established a reputation for anything except—−"

"Except−−what?" Howard's familiar grin came to his assistance to relieve the deacon at this point.

"Except for a lot of splendid qualities that we all like, for a tongue that preaches a live religion and a smile that makes dogs love you," said the deacon earnestly.

Howard laughed. And if he had not remembered all the time the sleeping people in the little house, his laugh would have been one of the boisterous kind that sometimes amazed his sister and almost stunned Roy Lennox.

"What more could a fellow ask? And yet—−" and instantly his face grew stern−−"my reputation in this town is not good enough, nor my sister's, to make people believe us in the face of a silly story that denies all that we stand for. Think of it for a moment, Deacon Burton. Here I come into this little town with my sister, both of us with only one main purpose to build up this church and preach a real Gospel and make that the great passion of life. And in the face of that, some gossipy man or woman, careless of what it means, is willing, and according to your story, even eager, to ruin our reputation and call us liars when we deny, with proof, an impossible story that has been going the rounds. How impossible such a thing could be! What sort of a fool must the people in this little town think I am to throw down at the very start of my career the very structure I came here to build up and deny all the Christianity I profess—−"

He stopped, struck by the deacon's sorrowful look.

"Well "

"That is just it," said Deacon Burton with a sadness that Howard remembered long afterwards. "A few years ago something like this happened to a young minister in the Presbyterian church in Red Hill. It came out later that he was innocent, but the harm had been done and it was too late. Individuals have besetting sins and so do towns. Ours is the sin of judging others and believing evil of them. And I would not be a good friend to you if I did not tell you that in my opinion even if you and your sister deny this story and put your Christian characters in evidence against its cruelty, the town as a whole will believe you are guilty and nothing you can say or do will change its verdict."

It was an astounding statement, made with a seriousness that impressed the deacon's pastor tremendously. He had of late come to know and respect his senior deacon greatly and had already crossed the formal line that men draw between one another when nothing more is possible than a mild friendliness. There was an attractiveness about Deacon Burton that drew his minister to him, and in Howard's mind already the deacon stood for something far more than ordinary friendship.

He had been walking around the little room with his swift but noiseless step, mindful of the sleeping inmates in the house and even while speaking with deep feeling he had restrained the spoken word.

He sat down and his look reflected the older man's sadness.

"When you stop to think of it the whole thing is horrible, isn't it? The people in Red Hill, Kansas, are civilised and most of them would resent it if you told them they were not Christians. And yet they are willing to condemn without any proof an innocent person. Why it almost makes a man after all these years of Christianity wonder if there *any−−it makes me think of that account in this morning's paper of the way those English people acted when that big Zeppelin was brought down during the raid on London, you remember, deacon, the news item was like this:*

"`As soon as it was realised that it was a Zeppelin in flames there was pandemonium. Every one was shouting, hands were being clapped, steamers were using their sirens incessantly, and a few railway engines that were about were cock−o−doodling with steam whistles until the uproar resembled nothing so much as the advent of a new year in the shipping area.

"`Gradually the glowing mass was lost behind the outlines of houses, but the sky for some time was lit up brilliantly. Then we talked excitedly, we wrung each other's hands and acted like children, till suddenly, in sweet

contralto tones, were heard the opening bars of the national anthem, and there we stood, men, women, and children, singing "God Save the King," while the gathering light was heralding the approach of another Sabbath day. Who could have imagined three years ago that a million men, women and children would cheer and sing at the sight of a score of men burning to death in midair and struggle to get hold of falling fragments of the charred remains!'

"Isn't that horrible? And isn't it depressing to think that civilised people really like to inflict pain on innocent folks? Why it's enough almost to make a man give up his profession of preaching the Gospel and go to raising hogs and alfalfa."

It was the only time in all his life that Deacon Burton ever heard such a note from his pastor, and Howard repented of it as soon as he had spoken. His clean, strong, pure, normal spirit was resilient. It bounded back into its happy free spaces and found expression in the exclamation:

"Don't remember, Deacon, what I said just then. I'm going to begin forgetting it right now. In spite of everything you say about the people here I believe there are more good folks than bad in Red Hill and I'll *the rest believe me. They can't go on believing I'm a fool. In time they will have to—−"*

"Wait! There is another witness to my sister's testimony and mine. I had forgotten it! Deacon Burton, would the people of Red Hill believe your daughter on oath?"

"Believe my daughter!" Deacon Burton started up in his chair with an energy he rarely exhibited. "Believe Agnes! Why they would believe her lightest word; she would not have to swear to it. But what has that to do with this matter?"

"Miss Burton was here with my sister that night when Miss Clark called. She knows all about it."

A look of great relief came over the deacon's face.

"That settles it, then. Mr. Chase, the people of Red Hill are as bad as I said they were. But if there is anything I am sure of and proud of it is the confidence every one in this town has in my daughter. Agnes has always been, even as a child, the very image of truth. The pupils in High School have a saying, `Miss Burton says so.' That is never argued. If Agnes was here that night and testifies for you, the people of Red Hill will never question her statement."

Howard looked at his senior deacon gravely.

"Let us be thankful for that." Then after a moment of silence he said:

"There's Miss Clark. What of her?"

"I've been thinking of that," the deacon answered slowly. "Of course she is as much accused as you are. But what can she do?"

"Nothing. I wish she—−"

Again that curious pause on his pastor's part which had given the deacon a feeling of uneasiness before, but he waited now for the younger man to make the confidence.

He made it as if he opened a door into a new experience, feeling with every word he spoke the satisfaction of being perfectly understood.

"I haven't any minister, no bishop or father to go to and confess. Perhaps you will be willing−−but−−the fact is I have discovered that Inez has a feeling for me that−−I am sure you will understand it, Deacon Burton, and know how this story complicates the situation−−she really has or thinks she has fallen in love it sounds preposterously egotistic even to say it, but I am afraid it's true, and the feeling I have is one of pity and a desire to save the girl from trouble. I don't believe she would purposely try to do harm, but she is romantic and emotional. A city girl in a country town. You see now the reason for my hesitation at different times when you began your story?"

"Yes. You don't need to explain anything. I'm sorry all this has to come to you just as you are beginning here. It seems so unnecessary. Perhaps you need it for discipline. But, my dear Brother," the deacon said it with a note of real affection, "I have the utmost confidence in you. I believe when this matter gets cleared up we are going to have a real spell of real religion in Red Hill. But it will never come until the people of this town learn to let other people's affairs alone and hold their tongues until they know the facts and then hold them again until the Lord gives them a sign out of a clear sky to speak. We will never have a revival in this town until this evil−mindedness of the tongue is rebuked and stilled. It is our besetting sin and you are at present the most conspicuous victim, thank God you are innocent and we can prove it."

They conferred a little longer and when Howard finally declared to the deacon his determination on a certain

course of action the older man was at first startled, but after a short argument he said, "Maybe you are right. Do it your own way. Act as the Spirit leads you. The Lord has given you wisdom far beyond your years. It may be he has revealed to you the wisest plan. In any case we cannot part for the night without a prayer. Let us have that together."

They kneeled side by side. Deacon Burton prayed in the same homely plain fashion that he talked, sincere, simple, trusting, self−effacing. Howard spoke out of a heart that thrilled with conflicting emotions as he thought of the day so near at hand, breaking into strong demand for the people of his own parish, the sheep of his own flock, but at the last including the community in his petition, for the "other sheep," that whether he would or not had become a part of his parish and his problems.

When the men rose they faced each other and tears were on their faces. Deacon Burton's hand went onto Howard's shoulder.

"Pastor, somehow I feel as if the Lord was going to give us a Big Blessing in this little town. We need it. When it comes, I believe somehow you will be in the centre of it."

"If I am, I hope to prove equal to it," the younger man said, not boastfully but hopefully.

Deacon Burton paused in the doorway on his way out.

"I am wondering why Agnes, knowing everything as she did, has not denied the story before this."

"Perhaps she has not heard it yet," Howard ventured to say.

"Maybe not. People do not go to her with gossip. I cannot account for her silence in any other way."

Howard said good−night and closed the door and then went back into the study and sitting at his desk looked up at the Christ in the desert. And as he looked it seemed to him he caught its deeper meaning and was fortified in his purpose to carry out the plan he had mentioned to Deacon Burton.

Sunday morning at the breakfast table Roy Lennox and his wife were talking of the great interest they felt in their first visit to the west. Neither of them before their marriage had been outside of New England. The entire atmosphere of the western life impressed them strongly. They were enthusiastic over everything they saw and heard.

"Old fellow," said Roy affectionately, "you can't imagine with what interest I am anticipating everything to−day. I haven't heard any preaching since I left the Seminary that I care about. I envy you your parish. Seems to me it must be about ideal. You're just cosily established here, aren't you? Kate and I would give anything if we were as happily settled with a people that loved and trusted us and a real chance to work and preach. He's a very fortunate fellow, isn't he, Miss Chase?"

"Yes. I think so. You are, aren't you, Howard?"

"Yes!" He said it with his characteristic cheerful grin betraying no hint of what the morning held for him. He emphasised it with a thump on the table.

"Yes! I am a fortunate fellow. It's a great place for a preacher. I don't know where the Gospel is more needed than right here in Red Hill, Kansas. It never was more needed than right this minute. I'm glad I came."

"That's what I like about him," Roy commented, still talking to Rose. "He is the only minister I know who has real enthusiasm and knows, actually knows, without question, what he is in the ministry for. I'd give anything if I had a church like this one."

Howard excused himself after breakfast and went into his study and shut the door. Rose said it was his regular habit and Roy and his wife spent the time before eleven o'clock sitting out on the little porch talking about Howard and his ideal little parish and anticipating the service so near at hand.

Only a few feet away from them, in the little study, Howard Chase was going through a mental experience new to him as he dwelt on his plan for the morning.

He was not depressed by the situation that now confronted him, but he was concerned by it, and all his deep passionate hatred of wrong and littleness smote him and made him hungry to do the right thing. His experiences had not been very many or varied. He was not yet twenty−seven years old, and the problem he now faced was entirely new and he had no precedents to follow. Besides his own future in Red Hill there was involved the fortune of this young girl, and while he had not a doubt concerning the course he intended to take, he did not know what effect it might have on Inez. His real ignorance of nearly everything concerning woman's action was, in the present instance, in his favour, for he was not going to act with any fear of possible consequences in the face of the great end he had in view.

That hour he spent in the little study was a tremendous hour to his own spirit. As he knelt by his desk, his eyes open towards the picture above it, he seemed to be gazing with his characteristic habit of abstraction at something above it and beyond it. Dreamer and impractical mystic he was not in the ordinary sense, but he was as sensitive to the inner and hidden voices as one of the prophets, and he had that rare quality that a few men possess of absolutely forgetting himself and projecting his problem in front of him as if it were a real gift on a screen. And he also possessed the rare gift of a perfect faith in the reality of the Spiritual presence, and he would talk in his prayer to the unseen just as if the person were in the room and might at any moment turn into flesh and blood and become visible.

While Howard was thus preparing his soul for the event of the morning two scenes were being enacted in two other places that were destined to have important bearing on the astonishing outcome of the day. If Howard had been aware of them it might have modified his own course, and yet it might only have intensified it and made it even more emphatic, if that were possible.

On reaching home that Saturday night after his interview with his pastor Deacon Burton had mused in his quiet but not ponderous fashion over the fact of his daughter's knowledge of the ministers innocence and her silence in the face of it. And in the morning he felt so strongly impressed by it that he ventured to speak to her before she went up to the church, as her habit was, to rehearse before the service, her organ music.

The deacon's habit was very direct as illustrated in his interview with Howard. It was the same with members of his own family. And while Mrs. Burton was busy with some part of the house work, and the two were alone he suddenly said:

"Agnes, have you heard this story which has been going around town this last week about Mr. Chase and Inez?"

"Yes, father," she said after a rather long moment.

"And yet you know it is not true?"

"I know it is not," she said, with quick emphasis, the colour deepening on cheek and brow.

"And you have said nothing. You have not denied it."

Her answer came even slower than before.

"I have waited−−I hardly know why—−"

"Mr. Chase told me last night that you were there the Friday night when Inez brought the proof."

"Why has not Mr. Chase himself—−"

"Agnes, he actually had not heard the story until I told him. The charges made against him, if true, would ruin his character and force him to resign. You know the story is cruelly false. How could you keep still?"

"Father," she spoke faintly, "I had been waiting for Mr. Chase himself to speak, to act−−to do something. It was all so horrible, it was so widely circulated, I supposed he must have known−−I have been very unhappy over it—−"

"Daughter," Deacon Burton spoke sternly, "the establishment of his innocence rests with you. Mr. Chase would not appeal to you. Inez' word would carry no weight with Red Hill. You will surely act when the moment arrives to set him right with the people."

"Father!" she said, with sudden vehemence, "I will do−−I will surely do my part in the matter." She added with a low voice: "It is a cruel wrong! It does not seem possible that human beings can be so wicked."

She picked up her music and went out. Her father watched her thoughtfully and seemed to be deeply absorbed in something not directly connected with the story.

Inez' father, George Clark, the inventor and printer, lived in a world of wheels and pinions and cogs and belts and pulleys and sliding gauges, and sometimes whole days passed without any sense of the world outside his dream of the new typesetting machine which was to revolutionize the printing industry.

But coming into his den back of his printing shop late Saturday night, he heard voices outside in the alley back of the building.

He had been annoyed at different times by petty thieving, small parts of his inventions were stolen, copper wire and parts of rubber tubing and some bronz castings had been taken from a small annex behind his shop. And suddenly awake to the possibility of discovering the perpetrators, he crossed the room quietly before he had turned on a light and stopped near a half window high in the wall which happened to be partly open, through which the voices came.

And listening there that night at about the hour Deacon Burton and the minister were together in the study, George Clark heard, for the first time, from the coarse lips of several Red Hill youths, who formed part of a gang that was out late at night, the story that had been going the rounds, by this time, exaggerated and multiplied into a story so impossible in its vulgar details that the inventor became at once all father, and his first impulse was to rush out and strike down the ribald gesters gloating over a girl's folly and a minister's downfall.

And then his heart died in him as the question raised at a bound in his mind−−"Can it have any foundation in fact? Inez−−she was a queer girl, romantic, restless, amusement loving−−what if−−he had neglected her, she had no mother, she was alone−−impressionable—−"

He fell back from the window and the sweat stood out on his face. He waited until the boys outside moved down the alley, then, without turning on a light, he groped his way through the shop, let himself out on the street, and started for his home.

Afterwards he remembered he walked around several blocks before he found himself in front of his own little house.

Going in, he found the house dark. Inez had gone to bed. At first he was tempted to wake her and question her, and confront her with it all as a relief to his own sudden excitement and suspense. But he finally controlled himself, resolved, however, to have it out with her in the morning.

The suddenness of his opening the subject was in direct contrast with his usual abstracted, dreamy attitude, but Inez did not seem surprise or startled by it.

He waited until after breakfast. Then, as Inez was getting up to remove the dishes, her father, who had watched her moodily during the meal, said, harshly, "Inez, I want to talk with you about this story going the rounds about you and Mr. Chase. What have you been doing?"

Inez sat down. Her face was set with a hardness that did not belong to her soft features.

"There's nothing in it. Mr. Chase never said or did anything. He is pure and good. I have never known any one in all my life like him."

"How can you prove it?"

"I don't have to. Miss Burton was there that night. She knows I never went into his study."

"Miss Burton!" George Clark gasped, and his eyes gleamed. "But why have you not come to me? Why have you not said something?"

"Father, have you lived in Red Hill all these years not to know that when the reputation of some one was at stake a denial was always taken as a confession of guilt?" She said it scornfully.

"Why does not Miss Burton deny it then?"

"I don't know. Perhaps she has not heard."

"Why doesn't Chase say or do something?"

"I don't know." Inez spoke wearily. "Perhaps he hasn't heard."

Her father got up so hastily that his chair fell over. He came around the table and took Inez into his arms. He had not held her so since she was a little child.

Inez lay for a moment there as still and unresponsive as a dead person. Then, suddenly, she flung her arms about her father's neck, and began to cry.

"Oh, father! send me away! I can't bear to stay here any more. I want to leave Red Hill."

"Send you away! Where!"

George Clark was bewildered.

"I don't know," said Inez. Her cry stopped almost, as soon as it began. She seemed on the point of confidence, then suppressed it. And slipping out of her father's arms, began to take the dishes from the table.

George Clark eyed her doubtfully.

"Mr. Chase, Miss Burton, somebody must refute this story. They must clear you of blame."

"They will in time, I am sure," Inez said with a calmness in strange contrast with her recent emotion.

"They'll have to or they will hear from me," Clark, like many introspective and visionary people when roused, was vehement and loud.

Inez did not say anything, but went on with her work. When she was through with it she went up stairs, and came down about half−past ten, dressed for church.

"You are not going to go to church, Inez?"

"Why not?" she spoke, defiantly. "I am going over to rehearsal."

"You are a queer girl, Inez."

She stopped as she was going out.

"Maybe I am, father. But I am not half so queer as I might be−−if—−"

She went out without having given him the full confidence he might have earned if he had built up through her girlhood a real fatherhood, and he sat there troubled and dissatisfied over the whole thing except the knowledge of her innocence, and when it was time to go over to church, he went, somehow anticipating a scene, and yet he had no reason for it in his own mind.

Scores of people were passing through the streets going to the Congregational Church. The chorus rehearsal was interrupted by the early comers. Sunday School in Red Hill was held in the afternoon, one of the few towns that still held to that hour. Eleven o'clock was known as church hour and long before the little clock on the wall opposite the organ pointed the time, the building was crowded, the annex had overflowed, seats had been brought in again from the parsonage and the next house, groups of men and boys stood outside the open windows and bunches of men who could not get in even to the little vestibule could be seen together engaged in conversation carried on in a low tone, but evidently centering around the new minister and the latest scandal.

Roy Lennox and his bride seating with Rose were intensely interested in the event. Roy watched every movement of his old chum. The spirit of hero worship completely invested him. He whispered to Kate as Howard went up and took his seat, "Isn't he just splendid! Isn't it great! The whole thing is great! I'd give anything if I had such a church and such a people!"

There was an air of expectancy over the room. Agnes Burton, at the organ, betrayed no unusual feeling, but her inward feeling was tumult. Inez, in the chorus, sat looking straight forward, her hands clasped over her hymn book, her thoughts anywhere except on the order of worship.

And over the whole of that strange service as it went on, up to the time when Howard rose to preach, a powerful Presence brooded unseen and unnoted by any of the hearts that beat fast, unseen and unnoted by all except the minister himself as he rose to give his prophet message to the people of Red Hill that day.

CHAPTER VII

Howard Chase was in the habit of reading his scripture just before his sermon. And when he reached that place in the service on that memorable Sunday morning in Red Hill, he began to read from a modern version, so different from the version Red Hill people had always heard that they actually sat up and listened to it. A thing they had not done for years, as the Bible had been read in a listless perfunctory manner from the pulpit.

He announced that his text for his sermon was the entire passage he was going to read and simply stating the name of the author of the modern version he gave out the passage as found in James, third chapter, beginning at the second verse; and a passage from the fourth chapter, the eleventh verse.

As Howard began to read, Deacon Burton shot a side glance at Deacon Allen, who always sat in a particular pew, the second row from the pulpit, under one of the east windows.

His face was a study for the higher critic, to say nothing of a painter of church windows.

A strange conflict had been going on in Deacon Allen since the advent of the new minister into Red Hill. The deacon was a born conservative of the most conservative type. He had not had a new idea on religion for forty years. And he did not intend to have one for forty years more, if he could help it. He was an implement dealer in business and he was constantly buying and selling new and improved farm machinery. But his religious mind was still using the sickle and scythe and wooden plow and his soul recoiled with holy horror at the thought of a twine binder, a header or a traction plow in the religious field. The religion of Deacon Allen's mind had stood still in its tracks so long that it was incapable of movement or change, and his views of the Bible, of God, of Inspiration, of the Atonement and the Church were so defined for himself that he could no more break away from them and mark out a fresh and new road than the Chinese traveller over the century old ruts of the wooden wheel roads from Nanking to Shansi can get out of the twenty feet deep gullies made by the passage of millions of Chinamen for hundreds of years.

And yet the deacon was capable of personal affection of a real and positive sort, and it was this fact that was troubling and vexing him right now. From the first handclasp with this fiery, enthusiastic, unselfish, winsome, independent young preacher, something up in Deacon Allen's conservative mind and down in his affection stirred heart had gone out towards the minister like hunger after a meal. And yet it was a tug on the deacon's part between his intellect and his religion such as they were, and his emotions and his friendship such as they wanted to be, that disturbed him tremendously on this memorable occasion. And as Deacon Burton glanced at him he could hardly repress a grin even there in church at the sight of the inward struggle visible on the deacon's face.

When Howard announced the Scripture reading from James' epistle, Deacon Allen prepared his mind to hear the words and phrases he had always heard in church. But when Howard, with the abrupt and cheerful lack of apology which characterised his quick mind, made the statement that he was going to read from a modern version of the Bible that had just come out, Deacon Allen sat up with a start that jolted his whole body. If Howard had proposed to read a selection from Shakespeare or O. Henry, Deacon Allen could not have been more horrified than to hear his King James' Version calmly set aside and an uninspired set of words and phrases put in its place in the pulpit. For a moment Deacon Burton, as he looked at Deacon Allen, had a disturbed question on his mind, wondering if Deacon Allen would actually rise and enter a public protest against what he regarded as rank sacrilege. But no such thing occurred to interrupt Howard's even reading of the new version, only Deacon Allen's face grew sterner and more rigid in its decided disapproval, as the reading proceeded. And yet, if the deacon's heart had been able to register as plain a testimony as his face it would have been tremendously interesting to note that even with all this unheard of heresy on the part of the minister, the deacon's affection for the young man up there was pleading with his mental and religious convictions to wait and let events take their course, rather than utter the protest his life−long habits urged him to utter. He would, he said to himself, have it out with Brother Chase in private or make his protest in the mid−week service, or at a formal gathering of the Board of Trustees. For this departure from a time−honoured and sacred use of God's word was not to be tolerated. He should have conferred with his deacons before doing such a radical thing. This was a dangerous example to set the young people. This was the sort of thing Union Seminary stood for.

Deacon Allen's mind would not attempt to analyze the purpose of Brother Chase in giving this reading, and he

did not try to excuse the act from any angle. He was too much disturbed mentally and religiously to analyse anything except his own disturbance. But after the first few sentences he did follow with painful attention the words ascribed to James the apostle, whom Deacon Allen had always vaguely thought of as the Apostle of King James and possibly a near and honoured relative.

"For we often stumble and fall—−" Howard began, "all of us. If there is any one who never stumbles in speech, that man has reached maturity of character and is able to curb his whole nature. Remember that we put the horses' bits into their mouths to make them obey us, and so we turn their whole bodies around. So, too, with ships, great as they are, and often driven along by strong gales, yet they can be steered by a very small rudder in which ever direction the caprice of the man at the helm chooses. In the same way the tongue is an insignificant part of the body, but it is immensely boastful. Remember how a mere spark may set a forest in flames.

"And the tongue is a fire. That world of iniquity, the tongue, is placed within us spotting and soiling our whole nature, and setting the whole round of our lives on fire, being itself set on fire by Gehenna. For brute nature under all its forms−−beasts and birds, reptiles and fishes−−can be subjected and kept in subjection by human nature. But the tongue no man or woman is able to tame. It is an ever busy mischief, and is full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men who are made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth there proceed blessing and cursing."

"My brethren, this ought not to be. In a fountain are fresh water and bitter sent forth from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my Brethren, yield olives, or a vine yield figs? No; and neither can salt water yield sweet."

. . . . .

"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. The man who speaks evil of a brother man or judges his brother man speaks evil of the Law and judges the Law. But if you judge the Law you are no longer one who obeys the Law, but one who judges it. The only real Lawgiver and Judge is He who is able to save or to destroy. Who are you to sit in judgment on your fellowman?"

Those in the congregation who were noticing Howard's face most closely saw the tense gathering of the rigid lines that straightened his lips and, those near the pulpit caught the swift darkening of his eyes, as he began to preach.

It is doubtful if any large number of people in that audience that day could have reported that sermon in its make−up homiletically. But it is safe to say there was not a person ten years old who did not understand the meaning it had for Red Hill. Howard had not spoken two minutes before every one present understood perfectly that the fiery young preacher was preaching not simply to his audience, but to the whole town. Its besetting sin of gossip was getting the first and most thorough threshing it had ever had. There was something terrifying in the aspect of the speaker as he lashed out right and left at men and women who destroyed reputations with a sentence and blasted character with a word. And then gradually the audience became aware he was drawing the application down close to something strictly personal to himself. The story that had been going the rounds—−He had used it all skilfully, marking out a supposable case, "suppose such a story were to get started and spread until people believed it and without being able to prove a single part of it in court, suppose the parties interested could not defend themselves except by a denial; suppose all this−−what sort of a community must that be that would ruin a life or tear in pieces a reputation, cruelly denying to the parties concerned the only defence they had, and taking for granted that they were liars. The depth of such community depravity he did not attempt to measure. James put it as strong as language could put it when he said the tongue spotted and soiled the whole nature and set the whole round of life on fire, being set on fire itself by hell."

At this point he boldly abandoned the ground he had taken of an imaginary case, and with the voice and gesture and feeling of a young prophet he rebuked Red Hill collectively for its cruel and unchristian treatment of not himself, but Inez. And as he boldly uttered her name, it seemed to every one, including even Inez herself, that somehow he was defending not simply an individual, but a principle. Inez, sitting there in a tumult of feeling which she did not have sense enough to analyse, nevertheless seemed to be astonishingly free from personal embarrassment, as if he were speaking of some one else, and as he went on she found herself entertaining a feeling for Howard that was new to her, a feeling of great gratitude and almost awe at the bewildering thought that he was openly and without fear shielding her honour and defending her reputation as if he had met some wild beast on the streets of Red Hill just ready to spring at her and had seized it by the throat and was choking it to death. For the first time in her life the girl realised what her reputation−−of which she had been ready to be

careless−−meant to her, and her heart beat a new note as she dimly began to feel the magnitude of the service Howard was rendering her.

And yet, after that great outburst of righteous wrath against the wicked judgment Red Hill had been eager to pass on the innocent, including Inez and himself, in the face of his direct and fiery denial of any guilt ascribed by the story that had gone the rounds, as Howard paused a second in his indignant denunciation, he caught in one sickening moment the effect of his sermon on his congregation.

It had been soundly rebuked and sat cowed and beaten by it. The terrific blows Howard had dealt based on James' tongue lashing of the tongue, had gone home, and men and women sitting there recalling past instances in which they had sentenced the innocent, revealed on their faces a consciousness of Shame.

But with that sure but intangible sense which a public speaker has of the attitude of his hearers, Howard caught the verdict of the people as clearly as if it had been shouted out loud.

"What you say about the gossiping habits of Red Hill may all be true and we feel rebuked and guilty and all that in a sullen and unrepentant spirit, but−−your denial of guilt is the denial of a man who has not been in Red Hill a month, and it is unsupported by any other witness, and−−and at this point Howard felt the sting of public judgment−−a sting that left a certain poison in his life that was destined to linger in it for a long time, even after that judgment was reversed−−they were not believing him, they were still counting him guilty, they would go out from the service with their tongues in their cheeks and with the innuendo of an unconvinced mind, whisper to one another as they walked home, "he put up a great preach, but−−well−−you know how it is. And did you watch the girl−−well—−"

The whole horrible result of long years in Red Hill of allowing the gossip to pour its poison into the very life of the community was becoming plain to him as he paused in that second when he had looked for vindication and victory and realised he faced a sullen, whipped audience that still held wickedly to doubt and incredulity.

He had never been nearer disaster and despair in all his life than at that moment. It seemed to him in one sharp moment as if it was of no use to be good. He staggered on his feet and grasped the edge of his pulpit to steady himself. He felt as if in another moment he would be renouncing Red Hill, his ministry, the church, and possibly his own faith.

And at that moment, when his mind was on the very balancing edge of some tragic decision, Agnes Burton stood up in her place in the chorus.

She had been sitting there through the service, her mind and heart troubled over many things. From the moment of Howard's coming into the little town Agnes Burton had begun a new existence. She was intelligent, resourceful, attractive mentally and physically, happy in her work as a teacher, surrounded at home by comfort and affection, enthusiastic over her profession without being a faddist, a cultured reader and a cheerful observer, a favourite with her pupils and honoured and trusted by Red Hill, which felt proud of its High School teacher and gave her the rare tribute of perfect confidence.

Howard Chase came into the little town, bringing into it the one thing it lacked, an original, dominating personality, clean−minded, purposeful, happy, fiery and intensely religious without being sectarian. Not that Red Hill lacked educated men. There was more than one college and university man in Howard's congregation. But Agnes Burton had never met, except in fiction, any one like Howard, and it is not betraying any secret to say that she had already permitted the thought of him to occupy far more place in her heart than was good for the peace of mind of a high school teacher who is devoted to her profession of teaching.

And her mind was troubled. Why had the minister almost from that first day he had met, the Sunday morning after his first sermon, seemed to be on his guard in a peculiar way. He was courteous, a perfect gentleman, if sometimes absent−minded, he was delightfully humourous, he was simple as a child in his frankness, and yet, like some invisible cord that stretched between him and some possible better understanding, in the brief time he had been in Red Hill and an occasional visitor at her father's house, a barrier was gently but firmly raised.

Why had he not asked her to refute the story going around? Was it pride, or a sense of his own sufficiency? She did not know. But as he went on with his sermon she was swift to realise the incredulity of the congregation. She saw what he felt so keenly and knew in a moment that her testimony was the thing that could save his standing with the People. And she found herself facing the audience, the right word on her lips and the accent of absolute truth speaking with voice and eye and bodily movement.

Well was it for her and the future of Howard Chase that she occupied a unique place in the confidence of Red

Hill. It had never once questioned her word, never once doubted, as her father had told Howard. And as she went on to say that she was with Rose on that particular evening from which the story had started and knew from personal knowledge that Inez had never been into the minister's study, the audience responded to her statement, and like an audible vote of confidence, Howard, as he still stood by the pulpit, saw the reversal of judgment the people had passed on his own denial.

He had not even turned his head in the direction of Agnes Burton while she was speaking. He had remained standing there sternly facing the people noting with keen sensitiveness its change of attitude, a blending of emotions stirring his whole being as she spoke. And when she sat down, he still stood there, the stern look softened a little, but the spirit of abstraction on his face, his eyes with a vision of other things in them, something the people could not read.

It was very still for several moments. Then he suddenly bowed his head and offered a prayer, so tender, so close to the Divine, that the quiet deepened and the people seemed moved by a real Presence from another world, a world made real by his own nearness to it. A period of several seconds after the prayer, he spoke the Benediction, but the people remained in their seats, not moving until Howard himself started to go down the pulpit steps.

He had taken one stride in his swift impulsive manner when a sudden commotion was seen in the choir seats. Agnes Burton was leaning over Inez, who had fainted. Mrs. Burton went up to the platform and others crowded up and Inez was finally carried out into the Sunday School room, and Miss Burton went home with Inez when she recovered. That was one reason why Howard did not see Agnes Burton until the evening service, when she presided at the organ with the outdoor chorus. And after the first moment of disappointment at his apparent lack of appreciation of what she had done, he was glad he would have time to think over more at his leisure the whole event.

When he went down from the platform the first to greet him were his chum, Roy Lennox, and his wife. Tears were on their faces as they grasped his hands. They did not understand all that had led up to the morning, but they could not fail to understand its great meaning to Howard.

The people greeted him as he moved down the aisle, with a mingling of shame and pride. Shame at their own conduct, pride that their minister was free from guilt. He was the centre of every look, the object of all talk in the church and outside.

The Expressman had managed to get into the vestibule, and as the crowd there was slowly going out, he rubbed against the Santa Fe Agent, who also had been able to leave his station for the service.

"I dunno just how you feel," said the Expressman, "but if there'd been a crack in the wagon small enough I'd a leaked through this morning."

"He give it to us straight all right," said the Agent very soberly. "He run a special and had the right o' way over even No. 3."

"It'll be some time, I reckon," said the Expressman as he reached the sidewalk, "before the women do any more talkin' about Mr. Chase."

"Yes, or the men either," said the Agent. "It seemed to me the order sent out by the Superintendent James applied to all the employees, male *female."*

"You're right," the Expressman nodded. "When I get a chance I mean to let Mr. Chase know how I feel towards him."

"Better do it before you back your wagon up to take your own box off the express," said the Agent, whose literary efforts led him to use mixed metaphors and figures of speech. "You'll get a telephone call to come up or go down one of these days."

"Are you preachin' at me?" said the Expressman cautiously. "Because if you are, I don't mind sayin' I feel mighty mean right now and if I felt any meaner, I'd be afraid I was goin' to join a church or somethin'.

"Don't be afraid," said the Agent with the blunt frankness of perfect familiarity. "You're only feeling natural."

"I hope it isn't catchin'," said the Expressman. "But I gathered from your remarks that you wasn't feelin' overly good yourself after that sermon. And I been contagiously clost to you."

When Howard reached the parsonage he was met at the door by his sister who had not waited for him to come over.

She cried, as she put her arms about him. Roy and his wife were close behind him, joining her in her

congratulations and happy if tearful emotion.

"Now then, folks," Howard was saying as he laughingly lifted his sister and put her on the dining−room table. "I'm awful hungry. Put something as good as this on the festive board and I'll eat it."

He was as happy as a boy, except for that inward memory of the people's lack of faith in his own word, but he could set that aside and did so, when the meal was ready and they were together at the table.

"It was wonderful, old man," Roy said, for the several times. "I knew you could preach, but had no idea you could give it to 'em so hard."

"Was it too hard?"

"No. Not if they deserved it. But I supposed, Kate and I both, that Red Hill was an ideal place. We had no—−"

"It is an ideal place to preach in," said Howard interrupting cheerfully, "because the people need converting so bad. I never knew how bad until this morning."

"I feel specially interested in that girl in the choir," said Mrs. Lennox earnestly. "I have seen faces like hers in New York on Fifth Avenue. Why, she is a New York Chorus girl type! How queer she should be living out here in this little town!"

Howard and Rose looked at each other.

"We have noted that," said Rose. And she went on to give Kate some of Inez' history. Mrs. Lennox expressed more and more interest.

"A girl like that ought to live in a big city. She will never develop in this little place. She will either marry some inferior young man and settle down to a frivolous petty existence or she will commit some serious fault and lose all possible future usefulness." Mrs. Lennox spoke with the keen sense of a woman of wide observation and her next remark revealed her deep interest in Inez as a human creature who had attracted her sympathy.

"Roy," she said, "why couldn't we take that girl back to New York with us and help her develop in her own atmosphere?"

"We could," said Roy, who admired his wife and respected her as well as loved her. "But how do you know she would come? You speak of it as if she was a sunflower we could pick, or a souvenir we could get at the drug store."

"No!" Rose spoke up eagerly, glancing at her brother. "There is a reasonable possibility that she would go. I tell you. Talk with Miss Burton about Inez. She knows her better than any one else. Poor girl. She hasn't any mother or sister. I don't know what her future will be here if she stays in Red Hill."

"Say," said Roy with sudden enthusiasm, "there's a schoolma'am for you. If I wasn't married already or was a Mormon−−Howard, how are you going to tell the schoolma'am you are much obliged? I'd like to be present—−"

For the first time since he had known him Roy Lennox felt an embarrassment in Howard's look as he sat there facing him across the table. He seemed uneasy, and did not reply even with a smile or his old, familiar grin, and Roy felt his wife's foot gently pressing against his under the table.

"I'll talk with Miss Burton and Miss Clark, too," Mrs. Lennox said. "I feel very certain we could, Roy and I, set that girl into the right place in New York and help her. She is one of the sort that cannot get through life without help, and somehow this morning as I sat looking at her lovely face up there, I seemed to feel like a big sister to her, and to know I could help her."

"It would be a great thing for her if you could," said Howard, and an inward sigh of relief from an invisible burden escaped him, a sigh that not even Rose suspected.

He spent the afternoon, following the Sunday School session, in getting ready for the evening service, a deepening feeling in his spirit that the results he was praying for were going to be manifest. But not even his own sanguine hopes had anticipated the reality.

The morning service had cleared the way for it. The Spirit had been moving all through that dramatic event. Howard himself had always believed in spiritual realities and lived in the happy, normal, healthy atmosphere of them himself. But as he came out of the parsonage that evening and started across the yard to be on hand to welcome the other ministers and the people he was startled to observe that the seats were already filled, although it was only seven o'clock.

He went up on the little platform and found that Miss Burton had already come over and her young people were present ready for the chorus.

It was no place for him to say what he wanted and she seemed to know all about it. She was as calm and

undisturbed as she usually was, and in reply to his quiet, "Good−evening, Miss Burton," as he stopped to receive the hymn numbers she had selected, she smiled and answered his question about the chorus.

"Yes, we're all here. And more applicants than we can seat."

"How is Miss Clark?"

"I left her a little while ago. She is all right, I think."

There was not a word about the morning and it did not seem necessary.

He greeted Brother Gray who had just arrived.

Harris the Presbyterian man was to preach. The ministers as they came up met him with great heartiness. The atmosphere was vastly different from that of the Sunday evening before. And over all the place a quiet brooded that was new to Red Hill.

It had known the usual evangelistic campaigns and had grown more or less callous to protracted meetings and special revival services in the winter.

The idea that the Spirit of God might come and express his might without any advertising or printing or paid professional, had never dawned on the church members of Red Hill. They had always been taught that revivals were mostly man made, as if God were a hard being to please and had to be coaxed into a town or a church and enticed into a forgiving spirit before He would condescend to convert anybody or add to the church membership.

But to−night before the first hymn was sung, Howard, with his sensitive soul keen to divine motion, felt the stirring of power over the people.

The night was still. The sky was clear. The hearts of Red Hill had been rebuked for a gross sin. The different congregations and their pastors were, for the time at least, leaning in sympathy and good will towards one another.

And when Howard rose to pray, a breath from heaven seemed to flow over the place. And Red Hill began to say to itself for the first time in its history−−as it sat there under the prairie stars−−"What if God should show Himself to us in power this night?"

CHAPTER VIII

It will not be easy to make the average person understand the rest of this story unless he understands the full meaning of the event that took place in Red Hill on the evening of the day that Red Hill was convicted of a sin and felt the coming in of the spiritual tide over its dry commonplaces of business, amusement and man−made religion.

Red Hill had always prided itself on its high moral and educational standard. It compared itself with towns in Missouri and Oklahoma, to the disparagement of those towns. George Clark was fond of calling attention in the Red Hill *to the fact that the bank deposits in Red Hill were double those in the average Missouri town of the same size*.

"We don't spend our money for booze," he said in an editorial boosting Red Hill. "We believe in being decent and civilised and if anybody in Red Hill wants the saloon and cannot get along without it we advise him to move to Kansas City and fill up on beer and whiskey until he has enough. But we don't spend our money for booze."

And it is was true Red Hill did not spend its money for booze, neither did it spend it for anything else in comparison with the amount it put into the bank and had to spend. The country around Red Hill was rich and prosperous. Farms were worth anywhere from one hundred and fifty to two hundred dollars an acre. The bank deposits in Red Hill were over six hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year, and most of this money lay in the two banks drawing interest on long time. Red Hill had prided itself on its churches, schools and public improvements. Yet it did not pay any of its preachers over nine hundred dollars a year and rent of a parsonage, and there was not a library or a rest room or a drinking fountain or place for boys to spend time in the evening except Jake Seymour's movie which was of very questionable value educationally or ethically. As a matter of fact Red Hill was a pharisaic, hypocritical little town and was crudely unconscious of the fact. This does not mean that there were no good people in Red Hill. It only means that a town can exist in Kansas minus a saloon and a house of vice and a gambling den, and at the same time be minus also any positive righteousness that pervades the community. The absence of evil does not always argue the presence of good. A house to rent may be very clean inside and out and the smell of fresh paint may go as far as the sidewalk, but if the house does not have a living tenant it brings no profit to its owner and no joy to a possible hearth or home inside.

It is necessary to say these plain and uncomplimentary things about Red Hill in order that we may understand the need of regenerating and living forces for the self−satisfied, self−centred population. Add to all that has been said, that no one for years, including the churches, had made any attempt to touch the farming interests around the town, and the rural conditions were, as Howard discovered later on, simply astonishing, not for any depraved conditions morally, but for a condition of absolute apathy so far as religious enthusiasm is concerned. There was a number of educated farmers in the country, men and women who had graduated from the State University and from Manhattan and Washburn, but they were seldom seen in church, and had no special interest in Red Hill except as a place for shipping out grain and stock. As one of these college−bred farmers said to Howard when Howard began to go out and make his social survey of the country:

"Why should I go to listen to a man preach who can get only eight hundred dollars a year and who offends every instinct I possess with his century old theology and his insufferable prayers. Why should I spend my time going to a slow, uninteresting religious service that has no vital connection with real life when I can come in contact with the best minds of the world through my books and magazines and why should I endure the crude efforts of a church choir when I can hear my Victrola or my Edison?"

This may seem like an astounding statement, but it was actually said in all seriousness to Howard by one of the educated farmers only two miles from Red Hill, a man who had his automobile, his own electric lights in house and barn, the , , *and on his library table and the latest machinery in his fields.*

Howard looked at him as a new specimen.

"Would you go to church if there was a twenty−five hundred dollar man in the pulpit instead of an eight hundred dollar one?"

The college farmer looked at Howard as if *were a new specimen.*

"I might. But Red Hill can never get such a preacher. It can never get above eight hundred or nine hundred

dollars."

"How about going to church to worship God instead of being mentally pleased with intellectual sermons and entertained with professional music? How does that strike you?" Howard said with blunt cheerfulness.

The college agriculturist got red in the face as the point was obvious and for a moment he looked angry. Then he laughed.

"I see the point all right. You don't have to twist it around as well as jab it in. But I don't mind saying frankly, I'm not a good enough Christian to stand for that. I need the accessories of worship to make it agreeable to me. My wife is the same."

"In other words, you are an educated man making money out of God's earth and you don't have enough real religion to worship God in a church unless the service is intellectually and musically entertaining to you. And you are perfectly willing to spend two hundred dollars on a new piece of farm machinery to help you raise more crops to make more dollars, but you are not willing to give twenty dollars a year to help improve the cultivating of the religious field around Red Hill. I wonder if that is education."

Howard said it all with astonishing bluntness and left the young farmer staring at him, with clenched fists and angry eyes. And yet before the young preacher was out in the road, the college−bred farmer was asking himself when he had been preached to in that fashion and being clear headed enough to make a just estimate, he acknowledged as he slowly went into the house that the new minister might be right and something in his own definition of religion might be wrong.

All this occurred sometime after that Sunday night when the Spirit of God breathed on Red Hill, but it is mentioned here to show the conditions that existed,−−conditions that nothing short of an upheaval in men's life−long definitions could change or improve.

As that service went on, an atmosphere of otherworldliness began to envelop the audience. It was not due to anything in the service itself, certainly not to the sermon. The Rev. George Harris, who was the preacher of the evening, had not had any long or varied experience as a sermoniser. His sermon tonight smelled of the Seminary, and the careful work of the professor of Homiletics, who had a rule for sermons which was like a recipe for pie or brown bread. Departure from the recipe was fatal to the success of the pie or bread. The Reverend Harris stirred in the ingredients with a careful hand, measuring out the proper quantity for the different parts and then with anxious eye he watched it to see it didn't burn or fall. He was more concerned over the sermon than over the audience, which is generally fatal to the audience. But the sermon is saved. Like a successful surgical operation where the patient dies. But he was blandly unconscious of the fact, and did his best, not being used to such a crowd, and feeling somewhat embarrassed by his nearness to it, for the pulpit in his own building was carefully removed a respectful distance from the first pew of human beings and sometimes there was no one in the first pew.

Somehow that night the sermon seemed to be mercifully detached from its surroundings. Something bigger than any sermon had seized Red Hill. It was under the spell of a Divine breath that blew out of God's scented gardens, and the people sat in perfect silence, not listening to the sermon but to another voice that spoke to them out of the silences of God, a voice they had not heard nor heeded through all the years.

And the first outward sign of that presence came right after Howard's prayer. By some merciful arrangement of the parts of the service Howard prayed immediately at the close of the sermon. If you have ever gone from a room in some vulgar rich man's house where every corner is crowded with bric−a−brac and every foot of floor space has some piece of furniture and every inch of wall some picture, into a room where the eye is gladdened and the mind refreshed by open spaces and the outline of two or three worth looking at objects instead of a clutter, you will understand the effect of Howard's quiet prayer after the sermon. Almost as if with a sigh of relief the people sat in a different attitude of quietness, and it was unbroken when the prayer ended.

Then the silence was startled by a cry. It was a woman's voice−−low−−clear and repentant, confessing the sin of evil judging of others and calling for divine forgiveness. It was followed at once by others, men and women. It was noticeable they did not rise, but sat with bowed heads, many of them speaking with muffled tones as if their hands were over their faces, or their tongues halted with sobs−−and yet there was no superficial hysteria, no evidence of emotion that had been provoked by any man−made effort, it came−−that real note of repentance−−at first hand, without the mediation of a priest, as if the people had come face to face with God Himself and needed no other avenue of approach to Him, as indeed they had−−and the four ministers sat there on the little platform, profoundly stirred over a new and unknown experience.

Howard was more prepared for it than the others because his deep and sensitive spirit was always keyed up to God's approach, but even he was smitten into awe and wonder at what was going on there under the prairie stars. He could not help feeling his heart beat high with expectation while at the same time he could not help wondering what the outcome of it all would be, what human direction the event would demand, whether the usual evangelistic appeal ought to be made.

He looked at Brother Noyes. There was a look of bewilderment on the elder man's face, as if he were at sea in the very matter that Howard was revolving. Brother Gray sat with his head bowed, his lips moving. Harris was looking first at the audience, then at Howard, as if in doubt over the whole affair, but deeply moved by it, as if wondering how such an unusual service should be closed, having never had any experience in closing a religious service other than by singing a hymn and pronouncing the Benediction.

And at that point Agnes Burton began to sing. With the first note, Howard's heart leaped up. He had been thinking of her through the day,−−her action in the morning service almost compelled it−−and now she suddenly came into his mind again.

He did not know she could sing. She had not offered to do so any Sunday, but had asked Rose twice. Neither the deacon nor Mrs. Burton had ever mentioned such a gift, he wondered why, afterwards, but she was singing now, the one song that such a service required, and as she went on, Howard was startled out of his usual calm judgment of himself, to find himself saying, "Of all the people here tonight she caught the true note that ought to be sounded! What a help she would be in the ministry−−in−−some man's life−−in—−" He did not say "mine." He had not come that far yet, but it seemed to him that somehow the voice fitted in completely with one of his own deeply spiritual experiences, although he did not know music, and it did not generally affect him or move his spirit.

She sang, without accompaniment, a quiet but sustained contralto, the hymn that Howard had once looked for in the church book and was disappointed not to find.

"Breathe on me, Breath of God, Until my heart is pure, Until with thee I will one will, To do or to endure.

"Breathe on me, Breath of God, Till I am wholly thine, Till all this earthly part of me Glows with thy fire divine.

"Breathe on me, Breath of God, So shall I never die, But live with thee the perfect life Of thine eternity."

Every head in the audience was bowed. It seemed to Howard as he looked past Agnes Burton out into the yard that many of the people were on their knees. And when the voice ceased, the night silence seemed filled with an unseen Presence that stole out of the sky and gently and lovingly and yet powerfully put out a Benediction with its nail−pierced hand, dismissing the people from the outward service into an inward consecration where a new life was going to mark the new birth of that hitherto narrow and selfish town.

The people rose by twos and threes and went home in silence. There was no noisy hand shaking, no exchanging of neighbourly greetings. They dispersed without a word, as if the spell of the night were on them and they wanted to get home and think it over.

The four ministers sat on the platform, after the people had gone, as if by common consent agreeing to confer together over the event that had marked the day.

Howard asked them to come into the church, and by a united impulse, they kneeled in the little Sunday School room where Howard led in a prayer that seemed to break down all formality and open up the whole avenue of a real Brotherhood. The others followed, and when they rose from their knees the tears on their faces spoke more eloquently than any words of the real emotion of their hearts.

"Brothers," Howard said as they came out of the church upon the platform, "it's been a wonderful evening. No one can tell what will come of it. But I believe if we go along quietly and normally, doing our regular work, we are going to see some remarkable things in Red Hill and the country."

"How about getting an evangelist to come in and start regular revival services?" said Brother Noyes. "Although it isn't the time of year for it."

Howard looked at him curiously.

"Looks to me," he said gently but in his abrupt manner, "as if we had a pretty good evangelist now. The Holy Spirit has started a revival here. Why not let Him continue it? Can we improve on it by getting some man to come in?"

Brother Noyes looked uneasily at his younger Brother, then a rare smile crossed his face.

"The whole thing is so new that I spoke in terms of my old habits. But there must be some man direction of this God−begun movement. What is to guide us in this matter? What is our duty?"

"I don't see that we have got to map out any set plan. Let us go about our regular work tomorrow and in every wise way keep our spirits open. This event is so plainly from God that it cannot fall to the ground. The people are repentant. We have claimed the promises here to−night. We are united in our one purpose to help bring into the community the life of the Master. If this thing is of God, as it clearly seems to be, I am convinced, we shall be led to do our part in the wisest ways."

Howard spoke with a positive note that none of the other men could command, and without jealousy or argument they let him take the lead, feeling instinctively that something in him fitted him for such leadership, even Elder Noyes conceding the point that the young man was wise beyond his years, and bowing to his judgment and counsel.

So they parted for the night, none of them, however, not even Howard, understanding that event, or the ultimate effect it was destined to have on the future of Red Hill.

Monday morning around the breakfast tables of Red Hill the talk was usually the same wornout commonplace−−the weather, the show, the crops, the local politics or the local gossip−−this Monday it centred about the meetings of the day before at the Congregational Church, and in many a home, the Bible was read and prayer offered and thanks given at the table where such recognition of a Divine Being in man's affairs had not been made within the memory of the household.

At the parsonage breakfast, Roy Lennox and his wife were tremendously interested in Howard's account of the meeting held with the other ministers and expressed the greatest faith in the regenerating processes evidently begun.

Then the talk drifted quite naturally to Inez and her future.

"I'll have to start for New York soon, Howard," Roy had said. "There is a possibility that the Seminary will put me to work in the Riverside Settlement. And Kate is anxious to see how the girl will respond to her invitation to go with us. What do you think she will do?"

"I believe she will go," Rose said eagerly. "You and Miss Burton talk it over and then go and see Inez."

So that afternoon after a long talk with Miss Burton, Mrs. Lennox and she went to see Inez, whose father had excused her from work at the shop on account of her fainting at the close of service.

They found Inez pale but interesting looking and rather fluttered by the call of Mrs. Lennox, with no hint in her own mind as to its meaning. She was totally unprepared for the question Mrs. Lennox finally put to her, after Miss Burton had led up to the reason for the call, telling her of Mrs. Lennox's interest in her welfare and her soon return to New York.

"How would you like to come to New York with Mr. Lennox and me? Somehow, from the first time I saw you, I seemed to feel as if you belonged to a city, and at the same time," Mrs. Lennox went on, with a leaning towards Inez that touched the girl's imagination and stirred her affection, "at the same time, it seemed to me that if you came to a big city you ought to have a big sister to look after you. I wonder if you would be willing to let me `Big Sister' you for a little while in New York?"

Inez sat up on the couch where her visitors had found her, and her eyes glowed. Her fingers closed around a motion picture magazine she had been reading, and she looked first at Miss Burton and then at Mrs. Lennox.

"In my dreams I'm always walking the streets of big cities," she murmured, repeating what she had said once to Agnes Burton. "But I don't know that my father could spare me from the shop. And what could I do? How could I"−−afford it−−she thought of saying and then stopped, eyeing Mrs. Lennox with a child−like look that betrayed at once her ignorance of the big world and her eagerness to see it.

Mrs. Lennox seemed to anticipate her thought.

"Of course Mr. Lennox and I will want you to come into our home, and be our guest. But you would not want to be idle or just a sight−seer all the time. You would be learning something,−−finding out what you could best do, and making the most of yourself," Mrs. Lennox spoke with a charming frankness that Inez liked, but she still hesitated, glancing under her half−closed eyes at Miss Burton.

"You talk with Miss Burton about it," said Mrs. Lennox. "I will let you be alone. I believe it will be better so. But I shall be greatly disappointed if you do not say yes."

She took Inez' hand as she rose to go, and the girl felt drawn to her, she was so much in earnest, and so

genuine.

But as soon as she was alone with her teacher she turned swiftly and with an impetuous gesture:

"So this is your scheme to get rid of me. I believe you want Mr. Chase all to yourself!"

Ah! Inez! How swift is Love's understanding of Love! You saw the school teacher's whole attitude that Sunday when she cleared the ministers reputation−−you saw what not even gossip−loving Red Hill saw, the teacher's heart.

"Inez!" was all she could say, but Inez caught at her hand.

"Forgive me! I am so unhappy! But I will go away. It is like a story in a book, happening to me! But I don't know Mrs. Lennox. And I don't know what father will say!"

She was excited over the possibility of a dream about to come true, but now that it was in a way to be realised she began to be fearful of the unknown.

Miss Burton talked with her about it all, explaining to her what it would mean to be with people like the Lennoxes. And before she went away, Inez was eager, if her father would consent, to go New York and start new experiences.

"Do you suppose they would be willing to let me study for the stage?" was one question out of many that Inez put to Miss Burton.

"I don't know, Inez. But I know perfectly well they will not get in the way of your doing anything that will help to make a real useful woman of you. Promise me you will not do anything to harm God's wish for you, Inez."

"I promise," the girl said, crying a little, "if I only can find out what He does wish. Some one must know. I don't seem to myself."

She brushed the tears away and smiled at her teacher as she rose.

"And promise me you will send me an invitation to the wedding soon." She said it with an air half serious, half jesting. "And oh, yes, there is one other thing. I want you to tell Mr. Chase something. I feel ashamed to tell. And I may not have any opportunity if I go to New York soon. Promise me you will."

"Why, of course I will, if—−"

"It's perfectly proper. Perfectly," said Inez, with an air that made Miss Burton laugh. "Tell him that the lilacs on the pulpit the first Sunday he preached were put there by me."

"You put them there!" Miss Burton turned rosily red.

"Yes. _I_ did it. Was it very wicked! But I think he's been guessing about them ever since! It doesn't seem fair to leave him guessing."

And poor Inez fell back on her couch crumpling the motion picture magazine into shapeless wad as she cried and laughed together, her head buried in a cushion and Miss Burton standing over her, in despair over her impossible moods commingled of childishness and grown−up womanhood.

Mrs. Lennox called that evening at the Burtons to find out what Inez' decision was, and was delighted with Miss Burton's report. She went with her the next day to see Mr. Clark, and after a long and doubtful talk with him secured his consent to his daughter's going.

So Inez, in a fever of eagerness to go and misgiving about leaving, began her simple preparations. There was a pressure of work in the office that she told Mrs. Lennox she must help her father meet, which might mean several weeks, but Roy Lennox was getting greatly interested in the new developments following the Sunday night meeting, and Howard had any number of plans for using him in a county survey, so Mrs. Lennox arranged to give Inez time to prepare for her new life, pleased at the girl's evident sense of responsibility towards her father and counting the time well spent in acquainting herself with Inez and also helping Rose and her brother in the new programme of church and parish life that the revival began to open up to them.

For as the first few days succeeded one another following that Sunday when Red Hill caught its first real vision of a Divine Presence, the normal naturalness of the whole thing gradually crept upon the hearts and minds of the ministers and the people.

By a general agreement all the churches united in one mid−week service going from one church to another. These meetings, which were well attended as time went on, became the centre of very important decisions and ultimately the starting place for Red Hill's Community Life, but there was no unusual or superficial or hysterical excitement, no outward signs of miraculous intervention. Elder Noyes confessed to a feeling of disappointment.

"I supposed we were going to have a great revival after that clear manifestation. If we had brought Evangelist

Colman here right off I believe we could have worked up a great revival that would have shaken Red Hill. We made a mistake not to call him."

Howard looked at Elder Noyes earnestly.

"What do you call what we are having now?" Postmaster Long has doubled his church subscription. Judge Roland has joined the church. Rod Cartwright has paid his grocery bill. Angus McCall has settled his feud with Roderick Loder. The farmers are beginning to come to the mid−week meeting. Sister Jane Snowden apologised to Sister Whitehall in front of the post office for giving her short weight on her butter last spring. What more could you ask? If we are not having a revival, what is it?"

Howard's grin was irresistible. Elder Noyes succumbed to it. But he still felt like entering a protest at the lack of great meetings and some religious excitement. Howard called his attention to a number of other clear signs of the presence of the Divine power in the town.

"Have you noticed how interested the people are getting in real religion? Stop anywhere on a corner Saturday and listen to the talk. What are the people talking about? The war? The crogs? Politics? The high cost of living? The boom in wheat? Not a bit. They are discussing the need of a better school house, the character of the shows, the need of a library and some place for the boys at night; they are talking about the Bible and going over your sermon or Brother Gray's or mine. Have you noticed what the people are beginning to read? Golf's Book Store sold all their Bibles last week. And I started a subscription list for the *a few days ago and got nearly every family in my church to take it. They all take either the or or now, but no religious pagers. All these things point to a revival, Brother Noyes. Without knowing it hardly, we have a revival on our hands."*

Elder Noyes shook his head a little doubtfully. It was not the kind of a revival he was used to, and yet he could not refuse to acknowledge the fruits of the Spirit.

"And there's another proof that we're in the midst of a revival," Howard continued as he walked along with Brother Noyes, coming out of the post office, and as he talked, he held Brother Noyes by the arm. "The churches are getting brotherly. Why, I feel quite chummy with you, and the first time I met you I didn't know just what to say." Brother Noyes turned his head to look at his young brother and a tear dropped over his cheek. Howard did not appear to notice it, but went on. "And the greatest sign to my mind of the presence of a great power in Red Hill is the gathering sentiment for a closer community life. Did you notice that last week when we had for our subject, "What can each one of us do to help make Red Hill a better town?" what a crowd we had, and what interest they all took and what answers they gave? Why, Brother Noyes, if the people of this town and county once begin to ask that question in earnest we will have the biggest revival on our hands we ever had."

Howard's enthusiasm was contagious. It swept up over Elder Noyes like a freshet. He could not withstand it. And when he parted with him at Deacon Burton's store, he was muttering to himself, "I am beginning to think a lot of him. Just the age my boy would have been if he'd lived. God help me!" Brother Noyes went on to his little home, musing over that tragedy few knew about. To Red Hill he was an elderly, somewhat pompous, not specially interesting man. But a long stretch of self−denying years in the ministry in small churches with meagre salary had put its devastating hand on Brother Noyes, brave old soldier of the cross, carrying his burdens silently and quietly through the dusty years. And Howard was creeping into those dry places of his Heart. It was a way he had, Howard Chase, Red Hill, Kansas. Ah! What miracles love can work between men! It is, and always will be the great miracle worker of the ages.

Coming out of Deacon Burton's store that day Howard met at the door Mrs. Burton and Agnes. They had no errand at the store, but stopped to get the evening paper which was left at the store. The Deacon generally brought it out home with him.

They were going back to the house and Howard walked along, discussing the events of the mid−week meeting of the day before and finally a mention of Inez by Howard led Miss Burton to ask:

"By the way, when are your friends planning to leave for New York?"

"Pretty soon, I think. But I could put my chum to work on the county survey. I don't want him to go."

They had reached Deacon Burton's house and Mrs. Burton asked Howard to come in. He accepted with a slight hesitation that Agnes Burton noted, but Howard's action was so indefinite in its meaning that the school teacher did not dwell on it.

Mrs. Burton sat down for a few minutes with her daughter and the minister, talking over church matters, then without anything more than a few words about getting supper, she went out of the room. Blessed be , *or any other*

word you wish to use, of thoughtful mothers.

"Miss Burton," Howard said quickly, "this is almost the first time I have had to thank you personally for your action on that Sunday—−"

"You are not going to thank me for that—−"

"If I don't, you know without my saying anything that I will never forget what it means to me."

"I am sure—−" she began, and paused because he was gazing at her earnestly, "I am sure it was"

Howard sat there silently seeming to be abstracted even in her presence, caught in one of his moods of retirement that were characteristic of him, so far removed from rudeness that Agnes Burton was not offended, only more deeply interested in him, and she waited quietly for him to resume his usual clear wideawake attitude towards life−−and she laughed when he suddenly exclaimed, "Oh! I beg pardon, Miss Burton! But you were saying—−"

"I don't remember, it's been so long since I said it."

"I wonder if you know where I was all that time. I was thinking—−"

"Not of what I said, I am sure," said the school teacher laughing again.

"Yes, I was," he replied, but in such an impersonal manner that his answer meant nothing.

There was rather an awkward pause, and she finally broke it by saying, "Inez wished me to tell you something for her, and I promised. She seemed to think you ought to know. Do you remember seeing some flowers on your pulpit the first Sunday you preached in Red Hill?"

"Yes. They were so prominent I couldn't help seeing them."

"Inez wanted me to tell you that she put them there."

"They were very nice flowers," Howard said gravely. Something in his voice and manner set Miss Burton off in a laugh so catching that Howard, after a slow grin, followed.

"Poor Inez! But she will begin a new existence with the Lennoxes. I believe there is a good future for her."

"She will see New York at its very best with them," Howard eagerly assented. "If she has any good future, they will help her to find it."

Agnes Burton asked a few questions about Howard's chum which he gladly answered and in answering, unconsciously let in the light on some of his own Seminary life.

As he rose to go, she said, unexpectedly, a slight colour betraying her personal anxiety:

"Mr. Chase, are you well? It seems to me you don't look−−you look tired."

"Well to tell the truth I *tired. I don't just know how to account for it. Last few days I have not been at my best. Guess I need more exercise."*

She looked at him apprehensively as he walked towards the door. He lacked that characteristic swiftness and leopard−like swaying gait that people were getting used to.

"You are working too hard," she said softly, as if anticipating some trouble. "You do three men's work. You will break down."

"Oh, I think not. I never broke down yet. Thank you for telling me about Inez and those flowers," he said awkwardly. And with an abrupt good−bye he went away.

That evening, after supper, he said to his sister: "Rose, I'm going over to see Jake Seymour. I haven't heard from there for two or three days. I won't be out long."

When he knocked at Seymour's modest house across the Santa Fe tracks the Agent opened the door, and seeing Chase, he stopped outside and closed the door.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Chase, but Jake's got typhoid. Doc Vaughn took his blood test to−day, and found the germs. He's been comin' down with it now for several days. We thought it was his accident, you know. But doc is mad. He says Red Hill folks are too stingy to fix up the water works, and the milk gets no decent test and he says, doc does, that it's enough to make a cow kick over its own pail to see how quick some folks are to die early so's to save the expense of a long obituary on their tomb stones."

"Are there any other cases in town?" Howard asked when the Agent paused.

"I heard Mrs. Wilson's little girl had it, and two or three other kids."

"No! Why, it's murder!"

"That's what doc says. And there's no way to get the grand jury to convict. I thought I better tell you about Jake before you went in."

Howard followed the Agent in and spoke a cheerful word to big Seymour. He was too sick to do much more than murmur a word of thanks for Howard's interest in him, and Howard came away after putting his hand on Seymour's big fist and saying cheerfully:

"The Lord bless you, Brother. You've got a lot to live for yet. Your show isn't half over. Keep up a good heart!"

When he reached home Rose was in the kitchen. He went into his study and sat down at his desk and started to work on his sermon.

Fifteen minutes later, Rose passing by the open door, looking in, was startled to see him, not at his desk, but lying on a couch by the book case.

It was such an unusual habit for him, that she came in and went up to the couch, and found him asleep.

She put her hand on his head gently, but the movement roused him and he opened his eyes.

"Howard! What is the matter!"

"I don't know. I seem to be tired. Too much excitement in Red Hill. Not quiet and soothing like New York."

He grinned, and sat up slowly, looking at Rose as if seeking an answer to a question that trembled on his lip.

"You have never been tired in all your life," she said, with a feeling of terror.

"No. Time to begin. But *am tired." He lay down again. "I'll be all right by Sunday. I've been worrying some. Deacon Allen got after me again to−day. He says he going to call a meeting of the deacons and trustees and have the church take action on several matters, especially my use of an unauthorised version of the Bible. Deacon Allen was born three hundred years too late. He ought to have been a member of the state church in Queen Elizabeth's time. He could have had no end of fun persecuting Pilgrims and helping to fill up the and starting America off all right."*

His voice trailed off into a whisper, as he fell back into a doze again.

Rose went out and ran across the street to Dr. Vaughn's. He was not there. Up at the Wilson's, his wife thought. Rose ran up there, found him, and got his promise to come right over to the parsonage.

Two days later all Red Hill, including the country, knew that Howard Chase, the new minister, had come down with typhoid, and within the week that followed they knew that in the little room off the sitting room a great fight was going on over the strong athletic body for its final possession by the forces called Death and Life.

And Red Hill felt the event like a personal conviction. The town council met and condemned its own cowardice and selfishness in not taking steps to guard its own health. And as the days passed, and Life retreated before Death in that little room, Red Hill fell on its knees and prayed for the victory for the young man who had come to mean so much to it. Groups of men and women stood out in the street silently watching the doctor when he went up the steps or came out, questioning him. Rose and Mrs. Lennox and Roy, with the trained nurse brought from Topeka, went about the house, silent, lips moving in prayer, faces white and drawn over every movement in the little room.

One night, very late, when it seemed likely that Life would flicker out of that strong tenement and close the earthly door to any other tenant, Roy Lennox came out on the porch for a breath of air, his heart crying out for his chum, his soul beating hard at the gates of God's mercy to spare this beautiful life that seemed so necessary.

As he stepped out, he was startled by a movement on the little porch.

There at one end of it, close by the Madeira vine, kneeled a girlish figure−−Inez−−her hands clasped−−tears on her cheeks, no cry to disturb the one within, but a voiceless anguish of appeal. And at the other end of the porch stood, in the shadow, Deacon Allen, his head bowed, the muscles of his face moving convulsively.

Roy went up to the man. He did not know what to say to the girl.

"Is there any hope?" asked the deacon. "The doctor would not answer me when he came out. I thought perhaps—−"

"We have done all we can. We must leave the final answer with his God," said Roy, and with a handclasp of the deacon and a glance at the crouching girl, he went back into the house.

CHAPTER IX

The Expressman was visibly and audibly and externally and inwardly excited. This excitement he tried to communicate to his horse and wagon, both of which had been on the retired list for several years, but had not actually retired because of financial and other reasons which the Expressman had never communicated to either of them.

But he was now urging both of them, including himself, in the direction of the Santa Fe station, and when he arrived, he collided with the edge of the platform so violently that he was thrown off his seat backward into the wagon, where the Agent, who had come to the little window, caught a confused film motion picture of legs and arms from the recumbent figure of the Expressman as he struggled to get up, ornamented on his back more or less picturesquely with the excelsior shavings left over from the last load of furniture he had delivered to Deacon Burton.

Before the Expressman was on his feet, the Agent heard him say in between remarks to the horse and other exclamations not intended for publication, "Mr. Chase is out of danger! Mr. Chase is out of danger!"

"Hooray!" yelled the Agent, waving a ticket to Osage City out of the window. And he added, before going back to the ticket window: "He's what you aren't! Keep your old cow off the platform. You're breaking Rule G!"

"I'll break your old head for you if I ever get up!" said the Expressman, as he struggled with the reins which had got tangled around his feet.

But when he finally recovered his perpendicular and shoved his horse's front feet down off the platform, he was too much pleased over his own good news to do more than grin good−naturedly at the Agent as he came up to the window again to make sure of the news, for it had been a friendly habit of some years for the Expressman, who was a freer moral agent as he said than the one employed by the Santa Fe, to retail important items of news at the station whenever he came down to meet the trains.

"I was just going up on the street as soon as No. 10 got away, to inquire," said the Agent, looking immensely pleased. "Did the doc tell you?"

"Sure! I got it right out of his own mouth. I've been sittin' right out in front of the parsonage, in my wagon, last two days. An' I see some mighty curious things!" The Expressman lowered his voice. "Two nights ago what do you think I saw?"

"An eclipse?" guessed the Agent.

The Expressman ignored the Agent's pleasantry.

"I seen Inez Clark go up the parsonage steps and kneel down on the porch an'—−"

"Do you remember what Mr. Chase said about gossip?" said the Agent sternly.

"This ain't gossip," said the Expressman.

"What is it?"

"Just human interest. Mr. Chase said it was all right to have that."

"We−−ell−−go ahead," said the Agent, a little doubtfully. "You saw her kneel down on the porch, an'—−"

"An' that's all—−" said the Expressman. But he added quickly, "Deacon Allen was there that night. He's been terrible worked up over the minister. They say he was cryin' that night when it looked as if Mr. Chase was gone. I never see him cry except when he lost a dollar on a binder."

"But Mr. Chase is going to get well—−" the Agent said, lingering by the window to make sure of the good news.

"He sure is, if he don't overeat. Everybody'll be sendin' in chicken pie, an' things. I wouldn't mind bein' him when it's safe to eat again. I'd be willing to exchange pulpits with him any time."

The Agent had to go beck to the ticket window again, where in his excitement over the news of Mr. Chase's recovery he sold a lady a ticket to Pauline, who had asked for one to St. John. After correcting this little mistake, he came back to the window. The Expressman was still there, picking excelsior out of his clothes and looking very much pleased over the news about Mr. Chase.

"There's another thing I've been noticin' lately," he said, as the Agent opened up the key to Lawton.

"Is this more gossip?"

"Naw. More human interest. We're allowed to have that. Miss Burton, she's been going around looking like a ghost during the minister's typhoid. That typhoid has gone awful hard with her."

"Have you seen her lately?"

"No."

"I bet she's gaining to−day," said the Agent, pensively.

"What do you know about it?" said the Expressman, jealously.

"Not a thing. You don't, either. But Red Hill won't object any."

"No. They have my consent. An' I'll haul their trunks for nothin' when they go off on their trip."

"Better not talk about this," said the Agent, lowering his voice.

"Naw. I never thought of it till you mentioned it."

"I've been writing a few lines that may come in handy for a present some time," said the Agent. "Do you want to hear them?"

"How can I help it if you read 'em loud enough?" said the Expressman.

But he braced himself against the side of the station, close up by the open window, while the Agent, lowering his voice so that no possible listener in the waiting−room could hear, recited the verses he had picked out on an old typewriter he had bought at a second−hand store at a bargain.

"He belonged to the Bachelor class, And every day He was heard to say `It's a weary world! Alas! Alas!'

"He's no more in the Bachelor class, Because he has found By looking around In this weary world, A lass, a lass!"

"What do you think of it?" asked the Agent, not because he was vain or egotistic, but simply because he was hungry for literary talk, and the Expressman had come to be almost his only unprejudiced listener. The Expressman was slow to give an opinion. But at last he said, slowly.

"I've seen worse things in the ."

"Do you think they would do anything with it?" the Agent asked eagerly.

"Yes, I'm sure they would. At any rate, if they didn't do something with it, they'd do something *it. But if I were you, I'd be mighty careful about' letting President Ripley see any of your poetry. Some day you'll get so absorbed in your literary efforts that you'll forget to pull down the semaphore and No. 3 will stop here and then you'll be out of a job. Better go by the rule of the Santa Fe, my boy. `Safety First' is the only safe rule for anybody."*

"Yes. Like you observed it a few minutes ago."

"I can't keep my horse from runnin' away sometimes."

"Running away! Your old plug couldn't run if it was hitched onto a fast freight on a down grade," said the Agent, who felt grieved at the Expressman's literary criticism.

"I hurried down here to tell you the news about Mr. Chase," retorted the Expressman, in a hurt voice.

"Oh, yes, I'd forgot that! You're all right. I beg your pardon and that of the horse and wagon. And say," the Agent called out as he went back to the ticket window, "get some flowers for me, and send 'em up to the parsonage. I'll pay you when Mr. Bok sends me a check for the poem."

If the Agent and the Expressman rejoiced over the minister's recovery, what shall be said of Red Hill generally? There had never been a time in its history when it poured out such a collective stream of kindly feeling as it now poured into the little parsonage. Red Hill had never known the rare joy of loving somebody like that. The experience was so new that it did not know how to take it and Howard did not know how to receive it, as the days went by.

He sat propped up in the little bed room, rapidly convalescing, while Roy and Kate and Roy vied with one another to show their affection for him. The bureau and the little table and two chairs were covered with flowers, and Howard was bewildered by almost hourly messages sent in by the neighbours.

"Where'd that bouquet come from?" he asked Roy, who could hardly contain himself over his chum's recovery.

He pointed a white finger at a particularly lurid bunch of flowers evidently personally conducted together, to which there was attached a freight car tag.

Roy brought it up to the bed where Howard could read what was written on it in lead pencil.

"From the Expressman and the Agent. Bought with a check for a poem which the Agent expects to get from ."

Howard almost had a relapse as he read it.

"Place that on the foot of the bed. It'll help me to get well," he gasped, letting his laugh down into his old time grin. But there were tears behind the grin, as there often were.

"When I get well enough I'll make the Agent send me a copy of that poem. Tell me about the church, Roy. How's everything going?"

"Fine, all right. You didn't know I've been preaching for you, did you? Haven't dared tell you before, for fear it might retard your recovery. But I've had a great time. Only I wish you'd tell me how you manage to keep your folks awake. Some of your best people fall peacefully to sleep before I get to the second hymn. They look so happy, I can't bear to wake 'em up. The only time they rouse up is when I say something about you, so I mention you often. And, oh yes, you'll be interested to know Deacon Allen comes regularly every morning on his way down town. He was here the night we thought you were going."

He did not mention Inez. It seemed to him it was not an item of news.

"Everybody's very kind," Howard murmured. "I didn't know—−"

"All the ministers have been here. They've kept up the union mid−week services and the Sunday night. I heard something about a curious letter Brother Noyes had had from his Mission Board. But I don't know what it is. He said he wanted to counsel with you about something very important when you were able."

"Has any one else called?" Howard asked after a while.

"`Any one else!' Why, you old Bach, the whole town has called. I don't believe anybody's missed you, unless it's the undertaker. You've been the most called on man in the history of the town."

Howard grinned again, but rather sheepishly, and Roy Lennox, looking gravely at him, was saying to himself:

"I've half a mind to tell you, but I guess I won't. Some things are better to find out for yourself."

But as he sat there by the bed he pictured Agnes Burton, as he had caught the look on her face as she presided at the little organ, bravely trying to conceal her feelings and knowing all the while she was betraying her deep interest in the outcome of the struggle going on at the parsonage. Do what she would, exercise all the self−control of which she was capable, and she was capable of a great deal, she could not conceal from herself that her heart was there, not here in this little church, and when Lennox began to preach, she could not help seeing in his place the fiery, unconventional, wide−awake minister unlike any one else in Red Hill, as he swung around the little pulpit, sometimes in his eagerness, putting one foot out over the edge of the platform until she was afraid he was going to fall off, and then, with one swift stride, he would be over near the chorus end of the platform, appealing to all the young people there to lead the clean life, while her own heart beat quick as his eye flashed and his whole bearing spoke of power and the joy of living. And she could see the faces in the congregation−−faces she had known since she was a little girl−−and noted the astonishing change in them, no longer apathetic or sleepy or indifferent, but awake, interested for the first time since they were born, in a religion which was becoming as real as money and as big as all outdoors. She could almost laugh there in church as she watched Deacon Allen struggling with his conservatism and his affection, gasping as Howard tore in pieces some life−long doctrine or habit, and tears in his eyes as the next minute he touched some tender chord of memory in the old man's heart not touched for long, dry, dusty years.

And she knew, as she sat there, her mind and heart over in the parsonage, that if it were not for a worldwide conventionalism which made women repress their feelings, she would rise from her place in the chorus and go swiftly over across the little yard and fall on her knees before Rose and beg her to let her be somewhere near him. What was she thinking! But−−ah! he might even now be dying! And if he should, life would never be the same for her again. And when Lennox, in his closing prayer during those Sundays he was taking his friend's place, prayed for the pastor's recovery, she sat with her head bowed and her hands over her face, afraid of tears as betrayal, but she could not by any effort conceal her interest and during those days her face, as the Expressman told the Agent, was like a ghost's, if ghosts have faces, and more than the Expressman saw it, and commented on it. For Red Hill, in spite of all that happened, had not become angelised yet sufficiently to let go of the Expressman's "human interest," in this particular case feeling a glow of more than ordinary "interest" in seeing a romance wrought out before their very eyes.

With Howard's sure and complete recovery, Agnes Burton, almost at a bound, recovered her usual joyful and animated appearance. So that by the time Howard was able to go out and meet her for the first time, she presented a picture of health and loveliness that struck him with an unpleasant sense of irritation. His first greeting was rather formal. As for herself, she was struggling again to repress her joy and replied to his commonplaces with

others. And he did not understand how, if she did care, as she had seemed to that evening, she had asked him if he was well and told him he might break down, how she could be going about looking so glad and so gloriously healthy and happy.

Stupid! Ah, yes. But then, Howard Chase, Red Hill, Kansas, is not a perfect human being. Only a man, like other men, but different. In some things a child almost, as to his real knowledge of womankind.

All this led to important events which belong to their own place in this true story. Meanwhile, the high school teacher went her way and Howard went his, each taking up the daily task which needs must be done, no matter what the affairs of the heart.

There came a day early that fall when Howard was able to resume his pulpit and parish work and Roy Lennox and his wife had made their plans and fixed the date for their departure, with Inez, for New York.

They were all together at the parsonage the evening before the day they were to leave, and George Clark, Deacon and Mrs. Burton and Agnes were guests at the evening meal. Inez sat between her teacher and Mrs. Lennox, and the talk at the table flowed back and forth, many times centring about New York and its wonderful life, as Mrs. Lennox, who had been born there, pictured its best things, removed from its commercialised selfishness and social dissipation.

Inez was silent, grave, even serious, as she listened. Life was going to be so different for her soon. She sat there doubting over many things, anticipating and dreading the future, and wondering how it was all coming out.

After the meal, Mrs. Lennox, Mrs. Burton, the deacon, Clark, Agnes, and Mr. Lennox seemed to form a group for a moment, while Howard had gone into his study to get a circular Roy had been asking for, and Inez went out into the kitchen where Rose was busy.

"Miss Chase, will it be all right if I see Mr. Chase just a moment? I only want to say a word to him−−I—−"

Rose looked at her. She was trembling. A look in her face expressed a feeling that made Rose want to take her in her arms as if she were a little, sorrowful child who had lost a cherished toy.

"He's in the study now, I only want to say a word."

Rose nodded and Inez slipped back into the sitting room, and in through the half open door of the study.

Howard was at his desk, and had started to rise from his chair when Inez entered.

Before he could prevent it, she had fallen on her knees and seized his hand carried it to her lips.

"Oh, Mr. Chase. You are good. Pray for me. I'm not a bad girl. But I'm afraid−−now−−I thought when you were going to die that I could not live. I never meant to do you any harm. Pray for me, won't you? I'm going to be afraid down there."

Howard gently withdrew his hand and put it on Inez' head. And at that moment, it seemed to Inez as if in some real way her feeling for the minister changed from what it had been to one of lasting respect and confidence as her friend and pastor.

He was saying, "Inez, remember you are going to be in the home of two of the best people in all the world. You were born to be a useful and happy woman. You will have the help of their counsel and friendship. And promise me, Inez, promise God that you will not get in the way of anything that will help to make a useful and happy woman of you."

"Miss Burton asked me the same thing," said Inez, simply.

She was on her feet brushing away her tears, a different look on her face, as Howard said cheerfully, "We all expect great things of you. Remember, you're a member of my flock here in Red Hill. Don't forget Kansas. And don't forget what you've promised."

"No, I won't, Mr. Chase."

She said it impulsively.

"And I'll never forget your great kindness to me and what you did that Sunday."

"It's going to be all right," said Howard.

Inez looked at him silently. Then they both went out into the sitting room. Inez stole over to Mrs. Lennox and sat near her during the rest of the evening, a happy look on her face, new to it, happy forerunner of her strange life in the big city.

Next day an interested group was down at the Santa Fe to see Mr. and Mrs. Lennox and Inez off on No. 10. Red Hill knew all about the invitation given to Inez by the Lennoxes, and various comments were made on it.

For it is not to be understood that Red Hill ceased to talk about its neighbours and one another all on account

of one sermon. That would be pushing the miracle too far. But much of the "human interest" insisted on by the Expressman is a good thing. Nothing is quite so fine as dialogue over the event of other people, if it is free from malice and petty criticism.

So Red Hill thought of the astonishing good fortune that had come to Inez and talked accordingly.

As the Expressman himself ventured to say to her after getting her trunk check for her−−with the familiarity of acquaintance that dated back to her birth:

"You look prettier than any picture I ever seen. I bet New York folk'll turn around and look at you when you go walking up Fifth Avenue. But I hope it won't turn *head any to have 'em look around."*

Inez blushed and shook the Expressman's rough and not overclean hand, and the tears came as she remembered many little acts of kindness he had shown in going after freight for the shop in rush orders.

The Agent came up also, somewhat diffidently, holding out to Inez a typewritten card which he said she could read after the train started. The Agent, it may be said here, had once been smitten with Inez, but had foregone any hopes after being smitten by her when he ventured to hint his feelings. That was some time in the past, and he was all over it, and felt goodnatured towards her and really wished her a safe and pleasant journey.

"It's a pity the Santa Fe don't run clear to New York," he said, as Inez took the card and thanked him, her eyes twinkling over the memory of the Agent's brief courtship. "I understand some of those dinky little roads east of Chicago still carry red lights on their signal systems and run a slow special full of coffins behind every other number to take care of the aged and the dead and dying. You'll be all right up to the Dearborn Station, then you'll have to watch your step the rest of the way. That's the reason I thought you might remember what's on the card."

He didn't say it was his own literary effort, but Inez and Mrs. Lennox guessed it was as they read it, and laughed over it after the train started.

"Safety first on cars and trains, Saves many travellers aches and pains; And no matter how great the hurry, Safety first saves time and worry."

The last view the little group at the station had of Inez was the sight of her between Mr. and Mrs. Lennox on the rear platform as No. 10 swung through the bridge over the creek and disappeared around the curve of Red Hill bluff. And Howard Chase, as he turned back to his work, breathed a sigh of relief, and offered a prayer full of hope for one of his flock who had started on a new journey destined to be filled at the end with wonderful experiences and results.

He took up his work with his accustomed energy and enthusiasm. As the time went on, he began to realise some changing conditions.

In the first place, his long illness and absence from his pulpit had affected his congregation somewhat. The first Sunday he appeared the church was filled. Then as the weeks succeeded one another, his congregations dropped off. No community or church lives on the mountain top all the time or strikes twelve every hour. And human nature in ministers being about like the same thing in other people, Reverends Noyes, Harris and Gray had put an extra spurt of ecclesiastical effort while Howard was ill and increased the attendance at their services under the spur of the union meetings and the general awakening interest in religious things.

But Howard was not one of the easily discouraged type, and he had a strain of doggedness in his makeup that some men of brilliant and quick action completely lack. He "pegged away" as he said to Rose, with the firm belief that if he continued to make his services attractive and worth while, people would come anyway, and he need not be concerned about an audience.

So he went after one thing and another, getting acquainted with the farmers, starting a census of the town and getting ready to propose a scheme he had been brooding over during his convalescence to unite in one general interest the entire life of the town.

Included in this scheme was the straightening out of the film business, and one day when big Jake Seymour was well enough, he went over to his little house to talk matters over and see what could be done.

Seymour greeted him very cordially and frankly expressed his doubts about reforming the business. He was going to open his "movie" in a few days and he showed Howard a printed list of films he had had a friend send him from Kansas City, and while Howard was looking them over and asking rapid fire questions, he put in a word now and then about his own accident and his recent illness.

"I'm glad to see you're fully recovered from your burns that night, Mr. Chase. You haven't ever asked me about the details of the accident and I've not cared to talk about it, but—−"

Howard cheerfully interrupted:

"I'm as curious as most men, but I thought it was your affair and probably you didn't care to talk about a mistake, or something."

"It was a mistake, all right," Seymour grinned. "You see, the `take−up' reel got jammed and before I knew it the film had piled up on me and curled up into a hot carbon and whiff−−off she went. I did a fool thing a year ago that nearly cost me my eyesight. I took out a hot carbon and laid it down right on top of a film I had carelessly laid on the shelf, and−−see the scars?"

He pointed to several on his hands.

"I managed to cover it up with a coat. But—−"

He shrugged his big shoulders and looked at Howard earnestly.

"These titles here on your list marked with the red pencil, what are they?" Howard asked.

"Those are films passed by the Appeal Board over the Censors."

"Tell me about that," Howard asked, in his rapid question manner.

The motion picture man went into the history of the censorship of films in the State, Howard interrupting often.

"Then do you mean to tell me that the Appeal Board, consisting of the Governor, the Attorney General and the Secretary of State, sometimes do not see these films that go out advertised as passed over the censors?"

"Sure. If they happen to be out of town some one in their offices, some subordinate clerks, pass on the film and it goes out over the state `Passed by the Appeal Board over the Censors.' And let me tell you right now that one of the worst pictures ever shown in Kansas a few weeks ago went out over the condemnation of the censors with the Appeal Board's endorsement, and not one of the members of the Appeal Board ever saw it."

"Then, see here, Mr. Chase, we're up against it here in Red Hill, because I'm on a lock system and have to take what is sent me. And I don't have time after the stuff comes in on No. 5 to look it over. And then I can't afford, of course, to take big reels put out by the Paramount people, the high class stuff. They charge seven dollars and a half as a minimum for any film they send out. After I've paid my express and rent and light and heat and incidentals I don't ever make over twenty−seven a week, and in the off season I don't clear much more than ten or fifteen, and that ain't much, even if I am an old Bach, in these times of high living."

"And they sure do send me some of the worst stuff. It's old and patched up and cheap, I mean the film, and the stories are the limit. Cowboy stuff and love slush that makes you want to get into the picture and knock the bloomin' lid off the hero and the hero. *Excuse me for using that word blooming, but it's a substitute for a stronger one. I'm ready and willing to help the preachers clean up the movie, but will you tell me how to clean up the authors who write the skinaros and the picture fellers who turn the characters in the silly stories into next door to idiots and insaners? You've got to go back of the Appeal Board and its absent members, and back of the censors who have to pass judgment on what's sent 'em, and back of the exchanges who are simply selling what they get, clear back to the men and women who wrote the rot that gets made up into nightmares. Look at the titles. They give the stories away:*

"The Harem Scarem Deacon."

"Soul Mates."

"Two Slips and a Miss."

"Quicksands of Deceit."

"Pills of Peril."

"Right Car but Wrong Berth."

"One A. M."

"I tell you, Mr. Chase, if you can help put the right kind of shows into this town you will do the kiddies a lot of good. For believe me, they are getting some pretty seamy looks at tough life that ain't doin' 'em any good, and when the Appeal Board or its substitutes passes a film that the censors rejected they don't seem to give a thought to the kiddies, it's only grownups they seem to have in mind. But I see more kiddies than any one else at the show here, and it's so everywhere."

Howard talked with Seymour a long time, found him a rough but rugged soul, with an honest heart and a real love of the kiddies, and came away feeling that the show problem in Red Hill was not a simple one, but setting his resolute will and fiery enthusiasm to the working of it out, assured that Seymour would help, not hinder, any real

honest effort to better the conditions.

And then, as the fall months passed, and winter began, Howard Chase came into a new experience, so new, so unexpected, so humiliating that he felt as if he were losing his identity and were some one else, reincarnated, after a period of several aeons.

No. 5 brought the daily mail from the east, and one night as Howard sat in his little study, Rose brought in a letter the perusal of which kept brother and sister up late, debating on the right course.

The letter addressed to The Reverend Howard Chase, Red Hill, Kansas, was from a minister living in Maine, telling Howard of a cousin of Howard's father, relating a pitiful story of trouble, and after many details closing with the assurance that there was nothing but the poor house for this cousin unless Howard, the only near relative, the only relative of any sort, in fact, would assume the obligations of kinship and either take the cousin into his own home or pay for his board and room at a private house. The letter also intimated that in all probability there would be need of a private nurse and doctor before the winter was over and other personal obligations which would increase the expenses.

"It's Cousin Alfred!" Howard exclaimed. "How often Father used to speak of him and his unfortunate business venture! And to think of him facing the poor house! Why! He's a university man! We simply forgot him in our life out here. But we can never let him go to the poor house! It would disgrace the family! It's not to be thought of!"

"And I don't see how we could take him in here!" Rose said anxiously. "He's too old and feeble, according to this letter. And besides, with all your church, and—−"

"No. That isn't feasible, Rose. We must send him the money and let this Brother do what he offers in the way of finding a place for him."

"But you haven't any money, Howard," Rose said, with a feeling of dismay and almost terror. "You told me the other day you had only two hundred and fifty dollars in the bank."

"Sister," said Howard cheerfully, "you let me manage this. This is a man's job. I'll get the money. We simply can't let one of the Chase family go to the poor house! Why, it's unthinkable! But you leave it to me. I'll manage it. It's my lookout. No relative of mine goes to the poor house even if I finally go myself."

A rapid and exhaustive correspondence followed with the Brother in Maine, and as a result, after being convinced that there was no other course open, Howard sent on half of his savings to meet a longstanding indebtedness and provide for the first two months' care in a private house. And he breathed freer to think an honoured cousin of his father was not in the poor house.

Then he set himself resolutely to increase his salary. He had tried the pen while in the Seminary, and knew he had a gift that way, but had not wanted to take the time from his sermon writing.

But now he sat up until one and two o'clock writing articles for money. *paid him fifteen dollars for a religious editorial, and asked him for others. He responded with two a month and the little yellow check came with pleasant promptness. And during those three months following the receipt of the letter from Maine he opened up a vein of anecdotal items that brought him small sums ranging from two to seven dollars apiece.*

But then came a new experience, that at first be then humiliated him. And wildered, then angered, following that feeling, he had a fear, real penetrating fear−−the kind that makes the cold sweat break out on a brave man when he wakes up suddenly at night and sees no way of escape from a sure danger.

Deacon Allen served as church treasurer. The first six months of Howard's pastorate the deacon paid him his check every Monday, seventeen dollars and twenty−five cents. Howard, who had come out of Seminary with a little surplus, put half the check into the bank, gave his sister the rest and contented himself with drawing on small amounts by check as he needed it. The expenses of the parsonage were not heavy, and Rose, who was a miracle worker as a housekeeper, managed to keep almost within the amount Howard gave her.

But as that eventful winter crept on, Deacon Allen's check was less and less prompt. Sometimes, with a half apology, he would hand Howard a part of the amount, saying something about the difficulty of keeping up the pledges, or muttering a word about the hot, dry summer and the discouraging outlook for crops.

Let us hasten to add that Deacon Allen was not personally actuated by any small or mean motive so far as church finances were concerned. But following a life long habit of thinking in common with nearly every other member of the church, he gave as little as he dared to the annual expense, and went on the supposition that Howard had some means somewhere−−look at his rich New York friends−−and it did not matter much if the salary were not paid every week−−of course, it would all be made up some time at the end of the year when they

always faced a deficit and covered it with a more or less painful surgical operation on the pocketbooks of the few loyal men who would either double their subscriptions under pressure or help buy the articles the Ladies' Aid Society had first extracted from their husbands, in the raw material, made up into Christmas gifts to themselves.

But as the holidays approached and Deacon Allen's check suspended altogether for two weeks, Howard faced a condition he had never dreamed could be possible. The deacon had explained that the furnace needed repairing and a number of other necessary items, like insurance and so forth, must be met. That week an urgent letter from the Brother in Maine, supplemented by two large bills from a doctor and a nurse, brought a response from Howard that drew the last dollar out of his bank, and for the first time in his life he faced debt.

He had had a horror of it all his life and by superhuman efforts had managed to keep clear. But now he faced it and did not see any way out, and for the first time in his life he felt humiliated, deeply and cruelly.

And why, asks some hard−headed business man, didn't the fool go to his Board of Trustees and tell them to pay him or find another preacher?

Yes. Ask the ministers, some of them missionaries on our own Kansas frontier, why they don't resort to heroic measures to raise their own salaries! And see what answers you get.

Under other circumstances, Howard would have gone to Deacon Burton. But several reasons were in the way. How could he make his private affairs public, tell the people or even Deacon Burton that because he had assumed the kinsman's obligation to keep a relative out of the poor house he was seriously embarrassed financially. The church was under no obligation to support his relatives. That was his affair. He could not make the public a confidant in his private matters.

But there was another reason why it was out of the question to go to Deacon Burton.

He had at last come to the place where he could not escape his own conviction that Agnes Burton was necessary to him. The events of the winter had made it more and more clear to him in a multitude of ways that cried out with insistent clamour for her to come and stand by his side and be his helpmeet. And he had begun to hope from more than one tone or look that Love's song was not far from her lips if once he should go to her boldly.

But now! What could he offer her! He was a beggar! Actually a beggar! He, support a wife! Why, in a few days he would not be able to pay for the bread on his own simple table! He, a married. man! And this church, that had made a definite pledge to him in writing to pay him a certain wage for his services, did not think his services worth enough to keep its word and expected him to live on promises and excuses, and yet it would criticise him if he did not pay his bills or did not keep up with his outward appearances and his outlay for books and study what was required of an educated minister of the Gospel.

He went out of the house one evening at this time, the day after he had drawn his last bank deposit, and telling Rose he was going down town after the mail, he walked along through the dimly lighted streets, fear and shame and humiliation tugging at his heart.

There was only one letter for him, a long envelop with the *letter head across the corner.*

He had not written them anything for several weeks and out of curiosity to see what they were writing him for, he paused by the little desk near the door and opened the envelope.

Its contents startled him. He read the closely type−written pages over again and he was absorbed in the contents when some one going out close by him caused him to look up.

It was Miss Burton. He took off his hat and said good evening. She returned his greeting, and they walked out of the post office together, Howard still holding in his hand the letter from the , *and in spite of the presence of the school teacher so near him, or was it because of it, deeply pondering on the way which had suddenly opened for him a new career in life.*

CHAPTER X

The distance from the post office to the Congregational parsonage was only five blocks, but enough happened in that distance to make future history of tremendous importance for two lives in this story, for Howard Chase and Agnes Burton, daughter of his senior deacon and high school teacher in Red Hill.

As they came to the first corner where there was a street lamp, Miss Burton could not help seeing the *envelope which Howard was holding rather awkwardly in front of him as he strode along. For while under normal conditions, Howard was the perfection of graceful bodily movement, under the stress of his emotions caused by Miss Burton's presence and the contents of the long envelope, he was swinging along at a rather rapid gait, and if the school teacher had not been an unusually good walker herself, she might have had some trouble to keep up with him.*

They had walked as far as the corner of a second block with the exchange of only commonplaces, when she said:

"I thought I recognised an article of yours in the *last week, Mr. Chase. You do write for it, don't you?"*

"Yes. What was the name of it?"

"`A New Religion.'"

"Yes. That was one of mine. Do you read the *regularly?"*

"I've taken it, or Father has for me, ever since I was a child. I think it's a great paper."

"What would you think," he said suddenly, as if a sudden resolve had seized him right there, "of the influence a writer in such a paper might exercise, compared with, say, a minister's position?"

The question was so abrupt and so strange that she did not answer instantly. They were passing another corner, and she glanced up at him. He was not looking at her, but had the abstracted gaze she was becoming used to.

"Why, it would be an important position and a great place for influence. But is any place equal to that of the ministry?"

"Yes. That is−−Yes, I don't see why it isn't. The printed page reaches more people. It speaks oftener.

And I don't see why it isn't the greater pulpit."

"Perhaps it is," she said, a feeling of uneasiness beginning to creep over her. "But I supposed you chose the ministry because you were convinced it was the greatest career a man could choose."

"I did, Miss Burton. But I don't know but I may change my mind." He went on speaking, half in his abstracted introspective manner, and half as if he felt her interest in the matter. "Do you know what is in that envelope?"

He held out the *letter in front of him, and stared at it as if he needed the assurance of its sight to persuade himself he had received it.*

"No, of course. I—−" She shrank away from him a little, as a cold fear crept over her in anticipation of what was coming.

"Well, I may as well confess to you, first of all−−I−−that letter contains an invitation to me from the Editor to come on the staff of the *as the Social Life Editor at a salary of twenty−five hundred dollars a year, and I've about made up my mind to accept."*

"You−−have−−made up your mind−−to—−"

She stammered, and if Howard had been able to see her face he would have noted the fear and surprise on it. The confession smote her cruelly. The thought that he was planning to leave Red Hill, the added thought that financial motives were tempting him, the thought that he was going to give up his career in the ministry, affected her so profoundly that after her first exclamations, she walked on in silence, trying vainly to still the quick throbbing of her pulses, terrified at the prospect his sudden statement had opened up to her future.

"Yes," he went on, still speaking more to himself than to her. "I believe I'll accept it. I've done my work here."

"Done your work here!" She suddenly found her voice. "Oh, Mr. Chase! You have only just begun! You have only—−"

She did not dare go on, her voice shook so−−he must notice her agitation.

"Pardon me," he said gently, as if coming back out of his abstraction. "I don't know just why I have told you

this. It came to me as a great surprise only a few minutes ago. Somehow I seemed impelled to say what I did. There are reasons why I am making this decision. Sometime I may be able to tell you more fully."

For a moment he looked at her with a look she longed to interpret, but they had reached the parsonage, and Rose was out on the little porch, where she had evidently come, looking up the street as if to see her brother.

"O Howard, Mrs. Wilson sent word down to ask if you wouldn't go and see Lida. She seems worse, and is calling for you."

Little Miss Wilson has been neglected of late, but her illness had been one of the sorrowful results of the carelessness of the town authorities, for all during Howard's struggle and long after he was convalescent little Miss Wilson had continued to lie in the grip of the fever or its after effects. All through the fall, and now into the winter, she had lain like a wee, small white blossom, a lesion of the heart sapping the childish frame, until it seemed impossible the frail form could ever go dancing down the street again.

And all through that time, after Howard was out and at his energetic task again, it had been his almost daily habit to stop in and see Miss Wilson on his way down town. They had grown to be great friends. And Mrs. Wilson, in a moment of remorse, during one of those visits, had made full and tearful confession of her part in the gossip about Inez, and Howard had, of course, cheerfully and fully forgiven her, and his coming in was now welcomed as that of an angel guest.

He brought little Miss Wilson funny pictures and bits of interesting fossils he found on the bluff and odd little tricks he had learned, and her trembling hold on life, "Doc" Vaughn told the Agent, was, he believed, actually due to Howard's calls.

So to−night, with an abrupt farewell to Miss Burton, he turned without going into the house and went up to the Wilsons'.

Rose invited Miss Burton to come in and look over some music. She hesitated, but finally came in, and Rose was startled by her look as she came into the sitting room.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing."

But Rose knew it was something, for as the time in Red Hill had sped on, she had guessed the school teacher's heart, and the two had grown to have deep affection for each other, but no open word of confidence about Howard had as yet passed between them.

They looked over the music a few minutes and then Rose expressed a wish to try it out over in the church with the organ, and as the room had been warmed for some afternoon gathering, they went over, and practised for a little while.

Miss Burton, however, was evidently so indifferent to the music, and so distracted by something else, that Rose finally stopped in her singing and said:

"You're not looking at all well. Let's go over to the house, and when Howard comes back we'll have a cup of tea together. Come, dear. And if you're in trouble, let me—−"

They went out in the little yard, and as they crossed over it, Agnes Burton made a resolve. They were hardly in the parsonage before she turned to Rose. As they came in Rose noticed that Howard's study door was ajar, but there was no light in the room. Agnes was clutching Rose by the arm, and saying:

"I can't keep it to myself any longer. I'm as bad as Inez. But, oh, Rose, did you know your brother is planning to leave Red Hill and the ministry, and I can't bear to think of his going—−"

"I know all about your feelings," said Rose, calmly. "But the other is news to me. What do you mean, by leaving Red Hill and the ministry?"

"He told me himself on the way from the post office. He has received an offer from the *to come to Boston and go on the editorial staff at twenty−five hundred dollars a year, and he has decided to accept the offer, resign his ministry and go away!"*

Rose Chase was a young woman who had seen so much trouble of a peculiar kind that her mind was steady and her heart not easily disturbed. She heard the news from Agnes without any great excitement and her response to her friend's agitation almost shocked her.

"If Howard has decided on that, I don't blame him. Twenty−five hundred dollars is more than he would ever get in Red Hill if he stayed here twenty−five hundred years."

"I didn't suppose," Miss Burton began falteringly, "that financial reasons could tempt your brother. I−−that

is−−I supposed he was committed to the ministry for life−−that he—−"

And at that point Rose forgot herself for a moment, as the thought of Howard's self−denial and his financial struggle rushed over her.

"And why should not a minister have some financial ambitions like other men? Do you know the church has not paid Howard a cent for more than five weeks? He has spent his last dollar to help−−we haven't anything saved up. Why shouldn't he begin a career in a position where he can earn a living like other men, instead of breaking his heart over an impossible situation? You know, Agnes, that this church would let my brother go on preaching here indefinitely, until he grew useless in the ministry and never offer to pay him a cent more than he is getting now. Churches all over Kansas do that to their ministers. Can you blame him for not being willing to go on living a life of such humiliation? I hope he will accept the *offer and leave Red Hill. It doesn't appreciate him enough even to pay him his pitiful little wages!"*

Rose glowed with righteous wrath as she spoke, and Agnes, her face white, and her eyes staring at the unusual sight of gentle spirited, quiet Rose, towering up in anger for her brother, gasped for breath, and when Rose ceased, she finally cried:

"Oh, Rose! How cruel! I didn't know! I had no idea he was living under such−−Oh, forgive me, dear! To think that I was judging him to be mercenary! To think that he whom I love more than life—−"

And at that point both young women were startled by the sight of a person coming out of the little study, and Howard was there standing in the doorway, one hand on the edge of the door as if to steady himself and his clear gaze fixed on his sister.

"I thought," he began, as Rose and Agnes shrank back and stared at him with wide open eyes, "that if I stayed in there any longer I might hear too much, or too little. So I came out."

"We didn't know you were there, did we, Agnes?" Rose managed to gasp.

Agnes' reply was inaudible.

I went up to Wilsons', but the doctor was with Lida, and said it was best for me not to see her tonight," Howard was saying, calmly enough, but as he spoke, his eyes were looking at the school teacher hungrily. "And so I came right back here, and went into the study to do some thinking. I didn't mean to hear anything I ought not, and I don't remember all of it, but I couldn't help hearing some—−"

"Oh, well, you and Agnes can untangle it. I wash my hands of the whole affair," said Rose, shamelessly. And with the words, she gently pushed Agnes over in the general direction of Howard and herself retired to the kitchen, the door to which she closed with a good decisive bang as she disappeared.

She was in the kitchen a comfortable time, and afterwards told Agnes that although the supper dishes had all been washed and put away, she took down nearly every dish in the cupboard and washed it again, just to have something to do and to make a reasonable amount of noise.

But when she finally did come into the sitting−room, after knocking discreetly on the kitchen door, Howard opened it, embraced her, and then, with his well−known grin, a chastened and glorified grin, turned and presented her to the young woman standing there, blushing and tearful, but transfigured, with the words:

"Rose, here is your sister that is to be. There didn't seem to be any other way to untangle the matter. We discussed the situation from every angle, but after what Agnes said to you, and what I have been saying to her, there seemed no other way out but to get married so we could discuss it without being overheard the rest of our lives."

"Isn't he just awfully splendid?" said Rose, as she folded them both into her arms. And Agnes Burton declared he was. And she did not seem to have any reservation about it.

"And is she going to be a minister's wife, or an editor's wife?" asked Rose a little later, as she poured out tea and watched the lovers, with a delight she did not attempt to conceal.

"That's a matter we haven't decided yet," said Howard. "I feel like leaving it to Agnes."

"And I'm perfectly willing to leave it to Howard," said the school teacher, the roses on her cheeks and the starlight in her eyes.

"Well!" exclaimed Rose. "If you two keep on like that all your married life, you'll never get anywhere."

"We don't want to get anywhere, do we, Agnes?" Howard said. "One place is as good as another now."

"You'll be needing a hired girl, no matter where you are," said Rose gently. "And they're scarce. I wonder if I can apply for the position. Best of references, of course."

"You're engaged right now," said Agnes.

"I suppose you'll insist on sitting at the table and being treated like one of the family?" said Howard.

"Yes. And I'll come and work for you on one condition."

"Name it. We're in the mood to give you any reasonable concessions."

"My condition is that you will let me see you make love to each other. I mean now and then."

"I don't think we can help ourselves, Agnes," Howard said, and the look he gave her was returned with a complete and sacred confidence that opened up the gates of earthly heaven for them, the heaven that the good God wants his children to enjoy.

When Agnes and Howard reached the deacon's, it was still early, and as they came in, Deacon Burton and his wife were seated at the dining−room table, the deacon reading the Kansas City , *and Mrs. Burton sewing, in her leisurely, quiet manner. It was a perfect picture of happy married life, and the lovers exchanged glances in one swift moment, each silently revealing to the other what it meant in future vision of their own home.*

Deacon and Mrs. Burton were always glad to see Howard, and to−night they greeted him heartily and asked him to take off his overcoat and spend the evening.

Howard complied with the request to remove his coat, and sitting down in front of his deacon, he said, gravely:

"Deacon Burton, did you know there was a movement on foot in our parish, a determined movement, to break up our chorus?"

"No! Why it can't be! The chorus is perfectly harmonious! Agnes! What—−"

The deacon paused, puzzled by a look on his daughter's face, and Mrs. Burton, who had dropped her sewing at Howard's abrupt statement, gazed keenly from him to Agnes with a dawning knowledge. But the deacon still faced Howard questioningly.

"You are likely to lose your organist, I think. She has been invited to go to Boston, and she has promised to go if she can get the consent of her parents."

Mrs. Burton had risen and Deacon Burton was fumbling with his glasses, as Howard went over to Agnes, and the two stepped around in front of him, Agnes blushing and tears gleaming as her father held out both hands to the minister.

"I don't care what happens to the chorus. A duet like this suits me, all right. Been praying for it ever since you came."

"So have I!" said Mrs. Burton, boldly.

"Mother!" Agnes said, as her mother came and put her arms around her, while Howard, after a moment, spoke the same word.

Deacon Burton was so excited that he tried to mop his forehead with the newspaper and afterwards stuff it into his pocket. And when Howard finally went away, the good deacon, with a faltering voice, put his hand on his shoulder and said:

"My son, I don't know another man in the world I would rather trust her with than with you. This is a happy day for mother and me."

But when the family was alone, Agnes Burton came and stood before her father, and there was a gleam in her eye that revealed the trait that had given her such a unique standing with the people of Red Hill, a perfect passion for truth and justice and fair dealing, so strong and aggressive that it seemed more masculine than feminine. She was happy to−night, happier than she had ever been in all her life, in the love of a strong and splendid life, and her heart sang hosanna over it. But she was also indignant, with a glorious anger that transfigured her, for the first time thrilling to think she was speaking for her "man," and the deacon, for the first time in his life, was uneasy, and actually afraid of his daughter.

"Father!" she said, and her voice and gesture were eloquent with her new experience. "Do you know that our church is going to lose the best minister it ever had or ever will have, because it is so selfish and mercenary that it will not even take the pains to pay him promptly the pitiful salary it promised to give him?"

"What! Not pay him! Not pay him!"

"Yes! I have learned to−night that Mr. Chase−−Howard−−has not had a cent from the church for more than five weeks."

"Then Deacon Allen is to blame," said her father, the angry colour rising on his brow. "This is his way of

showing his feeling towards—−"

"No, no, father! I don't believe Deacon Allen would do that! It's all a part of our miserable, narrow, unjust view of the minister and his service. You know, for years we have always treated all our ministers this way. And it isn't because we are poor and don't have the money. Look at the men in our church. There's Deacon Allen, himself. Worth twenty thousand—−"

"Thirty," said her father shortly.

"And Judge Vail. He has just bought a new car."

"Yes, paid nineteen hundred and fifty dollars for it. He told me himself."

"And there's Mr. Yoder, and Mr. Claridge, and Mr. Allston, and Mr. Myron, and Mr. Colfax, well−to−do farmers. Any one of them could pay a thousand dollars a year to the church and never feel it, and you told me yourself, father, that not one of those men ever pledges over ten a year. Think of it! Ten dollars a year for services like Howard's. And they don't pay that on time, or until our regular annual appeal to make up the deficit. And look at the money the farmers are making over their wheat and butter and eggs and meat! And the church gets a pittance. I tell you, father, I am not going to stand in the way of my husband going out of the ministry into something else, if the church does not think enough of him to pay him, not what he's worth, they couldn't raise enough in Kansas to do that, but to give him a labourer's fair wages, and pay them on time."

Deacon Burton looked at her with a gleam of admiration. Then he turned to his wife:

"Isn't she splendid! Mother, I don't think the minister made any mistake. She'll look after his material interests if he is too spiritual to do it himself."

"Yes, I certainly will, father. But I don't believe you and mother or the church realised the conditions. I say Red Hill will lose the best and most useful man who ever came into it just because it is so mercenary that it will not pay for the best."

"You said, and he said, to−night something about going away. I didn't take it seriously. Daughter, tell me what you mean."

Deacon Burton sat up, roused to action.

"I mean, father, that Howard has a splendid offer to go on *as one of the editors at a salary of twenty−five hundred dollars a year, and I shall not persuade him to stay here unless conditions are changed."*

"Twenty−five hundred! You don't think our church could ever pay a sum like that, do you?"

"I do! They are amply able to do it. Of course, I know they won't. And Howard would not expect it. But he has a perfect right to make his choice. And I for one shall not be unhappy if his choice takes him into this new work."

Deacon Burton sat there eyeing the passionate figure, his grey eyes thoughtful, his mouth stern.

At last he said, "I don't blame you, daughter. There is something wrong with our Christianity when we pay thousands for material things and hundreds for the spiritual and eternal. There is one thing we *do, and that is, to live up to our contract with Mr. Chase, and I'll see that within twenty−four hours his salary is paid or I resign from the church."*

"Oh, Father!" Agnes was down on the floor by his knees, putting her hands on his face, looking up at him like a child.

"I am not pleading for justice for him, because he is too feeble to do his own, but because I feel the cruelty of it all, as Rose told me to−night−−I almost choked as she hinted−−they are supporting some one−−"−−then proudly−−"he is a man. I am proud of him. He is able to make his way. Look at this offer! And he told me himself if it had not come, he would never have asked me to be his wife. But now−−now−−yes, father, if he should choose, I will go with him−−yes, to the end of the earth I will go."

"Mother and I hope you would," the deacon said, tears coursing over his face. "He *a man! And Red Hill will, I hope, some time find it out."*

"But they will not find it out until it is too late, father. He's proud, in the right way. I don't want him to leave the ministry or Red Hill. But if it is the only way he can make a living or maintain his self respect, you cannot blame him, and the church cannot criticise him for leaving. I feel as if we were not entitled to have a minister unless we can treat him at least something like Christians and not like heathens."

"I'll see to that salary," Deacon Burton said, as Agnes rose, and went over and sat down by her mother. "And I'll see that Deacon Allen—−"

When Howard reached the parsonage, he sat up with Rose late, going over the great experience of the evening. Rose found that instead of being thrust out of the circle, she was included more affectionately within it, if that were possible. And when she retired she wiped away happy tears, at the thought of her brother's happiness, in spite of the fact that she had lost her own.

Howard Chase went into his study and sat at his little desk, his eyes on the picture of his Lord, his whole being moved by the great joy that had come to him that night, and finding his soul responding to the spiritual emotions that were a real and healthy part of his nature.

He was, in one true sense, awed by what had come to him. He had not intended to speak to Miss Burton until he had decided on his future. But his chance knowledge of her own feeling coming to him as he sat there in the darkness of his study, the sure knowledge that he held in his own hand the ability to make her a home, the insistent cry of his own need of her added to all the rest, had precipitated his action, and she had pledged herself to him with sacred, joyful, tearful consecration of all she was, to be his wedded wife, no matter what his decision as to his future. She trusted him fully, and believed in him implicitly. And it was that great fact more than anything else that awed and humbled him now in the midst of his great joy. Before he retired that night, there in the little study, he fell on his knees before his desk and thanked the good God for the priceless boon of a woman's love, of the one in all the world who would stand by his side and walk with him down the path, her hand in his, through the tremendous years.

Next evening, while Howard was in his study, the bell rang, and going to the door, he faced Deacon Allen.

There was a queer look on the deacon's face, as if the day had contained some unusual experiences, and as Howard ushered him cheerfully into the study and shut the door, the deacon glanced at him apprehensively, as if looking for something not externally visible on Howard's face.

He sat down, and after mopping his brow with an unusually big handkerchief he put his hand in his coat pocket and brought out an envelope and laid it down on the study desk.

"There is your back salary and a month in advance, Brother Chase. I regret, the church regrets, the inconvenience we may have caused you by our delay in making you the payment. We should have been more prompt."

"Thank you," said Howard, simply. And he added, frankly: "The money will be very acceptable, I assure you, and I appreciate the advance payment."

Deacon Allen gazed at him seriously.

"I trust, Brother Chase, that you are not thinking of leaving us, that you are not planning to go away. We need you here."

"I have not made up my mind, yet, what I shall do," Howard replied gravely, his mind leaping quickly to the thought that Deacon Allen had probably come to his knowledge from Deacon Burton.

"Of course, we can never pay you what you could get elsewhere," the deacon continued, looking wistfully at Howard. "We know that, quite well, and we wouldn't want to stand in the way of your advancement. But we need you here, and it would be a great loss if you should leave us."

"You don't mean, Deacon Allen, that you would miss me personally. Just think! You wouldn't have to be worried over my theology any more, and you could go to church without being uncertain about what was going to happen to the order of service!"

Howard said, not flippantly at all, but with a frank, good nature that Deacon Allen had at last come to understand.

The old man gazed at him seriously. Then a rare smile crossed his plain face. His lips quivered, and the next instant a tear, a real human tear dropped down on his rough wrinkled hand.

It was so eloquent of the deacon's real feeling that Howard did not know what to say or how to act. At last, he put out his strong right hand and laid it gently on Deacon Allen's. And the old man understood, and from that hour a friendship was cemented between the old and the new man that I verily believe nothing, not even the use of any number of unauthorised versions of the Bible, will ever destroy.

Next day all Red Hill knew that the minister was engaged to Miss Burton, or she was engaged to him, or that both of them were engaged.

And to do Red Hill justice, it was honestly and cheerfully and unanimously in favour of the engagement. As the Expressman said to the Agent:

"They needn't put off the wedding on our account. I never did believe in these long engagements. It's an awful waste of flowers and candy and electricity an'—−"

"What do you know about it?" interrupted the Agent. "You never was engaged except to get trunks down to the station."

"You don't have to be everything to know something," replied the Expressman.

"I hope they'll have the weddin' outdoors so the hull town can get to go."

"How do you know you'll be invited?"

"I don't. But I kind−a guess it'll be a general invite. It wouldn't be like Mr. Chase to run a de lux train on this life excursion."

"No," said the Agent. "You're right. It'll be an accommodation, and take on any old passenger, flag station at every corner of Red Hill and out into the R. F. D."

"You want to get that poem trimmed up so's it'll walk straight," said the Expressman. "I mean the one about the bachelor and the lass. You couldn't add another verse, could you?"

"No, I couldn't. The whole story is put into two sections. Couldn't run in another without changin' the time card."

"O well, it's pretty good the way it is. Put it into a box of candy or wrap it up in a round trip ticket to the Grand Canyon so's it'll have some real value. But there's a thing worryin' me some. Have you heard Mr. Chase is likely to leave Red Hill and go away after he's married?"

"No. 'Tain't true."

"Maybe not. But I got it pretty straight. He's goin' onto some magazine or other down east.

They've offered him five thousand dollars a year. The church couldn't raise that much in a life time. That is, not all to oncet."

"I don't believe Mr. Chase'll go just for money."

"No. But he might go for other reasons. But I hope he won't. We need him here."

Within the next two days all Red Hill, including the country districts, knew that Howard Chase, the Congregational minister, was likely to leave, and go back east taking his wife with him. For once, Red Hill began to wake up to the value of an individual, as well as to an acre of land or a bushel of wheat or a fat hog. Groups of farmers discussed the story, going over the probability, Howard's future salary had now grown from five thousand to twelve thousand and even fifteen thousand dollars a year. Most people did not blame him for going. The church people discussed the question gravely, but there was no general agreement among them as to any course of action to keep Brother Chase with them. If he had an offer like that, it was out of the question to prevail on him to remain in Red Hill.

Howard himself faced a real crisis, and was deeply concerned over it. The letter must be answered, and he was not clear in his heart or mind as to the right answer. He talked it over one evening with Agnes. Rose was present, at the request of each of them. Howard had frankly told Agnes about Cousin Alfred and the poor house. Now that she was going to be one of the family, she insisted on bearing or sharing all the family burdens.

"No one can know this but ourselves," Howard had said. "But it is of no use to conceal the practical facts, or deny that the expense of Cousin Alfred's care will be heavy. The question is whether I can meet it with my salary here, and keep up my own expenses, and keep out of debt. I would almost as soon be in the poor house as in debt. And besides, I have a wife to support now. Or shall have soon,"−−it was now March, and they had fixed on the first of May for the wedding−−"and I can support her on this offer."

They were sitting in the little study, and Howard laid his hand on the *envelope, which lay on his desk.*

"I don't see any other way," Rose said. "The church will never offer you any more than you are getting now. You cannot afford, either of you, to refuse this offer. It will never come to you again."

Howard looked first at his sister and then at Agnes.

Agnes Burton returned his look with perfect understanding of what he now said.

"I made the ministry my choice. I deliberately went into it, knowing its hardships and its small financial returns. It will always be this way. I have a hunger to preach. I love people. I seem to feel as if I were breaking a sacred vow to God if I leave the ministry to go into an editor's sanctum. But I don't know just what else I can do under the circumstances. Agnes, I wish−−I wish you could decide it for me."

"Howard! I will go where you go. I will accept your decision as my own. I have no choice but yours!"

She said it with all her heart, and he knew.

"But," said practical Rose, "I don't see that there is any choice, really. Howard cannot meet his obligations on the salary here. He can meet them with the *offer. And while I know he is born to preach and do parish work, and ought not to go out of the ministry, what else can he do?"*

They talked over the matter from every angle. And when Howard came back from Deacon Burton's after going home with Agnes, he went over it again with Rose, and when he finally kissed her good−night and went into his study he was still hesitating and debating with himself.

"I might write more," he had said. "I can sit up later, and take time without robbing the church of what I owe it. And in that way perhaps make enough to keep Cousin Alfred."

Rose had doubted this, but Howard had held to it, not stubbornly but with some emphasis, as a way out.

He went into his study after Rose had retired, and eyed the *envelope as if it were a live thing tormenting him. Suddenly he knelt and spread his hands out over his desk, the envelope under them. Then, when he rose, he seemed to have fully made up his mind.*

He directed an envelope to the *editor, and then began a letter.*

He had written two or three sentences, when a gentle rap at the door brought him out into the sitting−room.

Mr. Wilson was on the porch.

"We think Lida is dying, Mr. Chase. She spoke your name a little while ago. Could you come up?"

Without a word, Howard put on his hat and coat, and went out with Mr. Wilson, leaving his unwritten letter lying on his desk.

CHAPTER XI

Little Miss Wilson would never go dancing down the sidewalk in Red Hill any more. She would never again come shyly but in perfect confidence out to meet the minister as he went down town to the post office, and putting her moist little hand into his gravely and affectionately confide her life problems to him.

For the Angel of Death had claimed her that night when Howard was sent for. That is, by the Angel of Death we mean the criminal carelessness and mercenary negligence of a community of so−called Christian people, who thought more of their own ease and money and pleasure than of spending the time and means to guard the health of its own children. The Angel of Death is a pleasant little fiction good to use at funerals. In reality, the Devil of Disease did the business of rubbing out a precious life, and it was a human Devil walking around Red Hill complacently under the name of one of its respectable citizens known as the Mayor, who was, under the By−Laws of the town Council, also the Superintendent of Public Health. The Mayor was an easy going, well−to−do business man, a member of Brother Noyes' church, and a frequent visitor in his pastor's home. He was one of the prominent figures at little Miss Wilson's funeral, which the Methodist Sunday School attended in a body. It would have been a life−long shock to the Mayor if, at that service, Brother Noyes had turned to him and said:

"Mr. Mayor, under the regulations of this town you were the guardian of the public health of its citizens. We had granted you full authority to spend the money appropriated for that purpose for milk inspection and for proper sanitary precautions. You failed to exercise your authority because you did not wish to offend certain men who sold milk and certain others who did not wish to have their open wells closed up. It has been sufficiently proved by investigation that the illness caused a number of our citizens has been traced directly to impure milk and water. I charge you with the death of this child here to−day. It is true you did not enter this home and deliberately and maliciously poison this child. But you did allow to come into this home the poison which after a long illness finally caused her death. In all human probability you could have prevented this death if you had stopped the impure milk and water from coming into the Wilson home. You are real human cause of this innocent child's death. And in some way you will have to account for it to God who is your Judge. And may He have mercy on your soul!"

Of course good Brother Noyes never said anything of the kind. Ministers do not say such things at funerals. I wonder if the lies told by ministers at funerals will be written by the Recording Angel in a special volume labelled, "Facts about the Dear Departed; Covered up, Falsified, and Ignored for the Comfort of the Family. By an Easy−going, Softhearted, Feeble−minded Clergy."

Brother Noyes took the path of least resistance. He knew, as well as Howard, who sat through the service, tortured by the entire course of it, that little Miss Wilson's death was due to the Mayor's carelessness and cowardice. And yet he alluded more than once to the "providence of God," to which the stricken father and mother must submissively bow their broken hearts, and while not being able to understand the mystery of God's ways in taking this little one out of their home so early, they must remember she was now happy in heaven. Transplanted out of the earthly garden into the beautiful Paradise of God, where the angels would care for her, for this beautiful little blossom which God probably needed or He would not have taken it. And as Howard sat there listening to it all, it sounded like blasphemy or worse to lay the blame of man's wicked carelessness on a loving God, who wanted the little child to grow up in the earthly garden, and certainly did not plan to have it transplanted for his own personal pleasure into his own Paradise.

The service made a profound impression on Howard, not because of anything Brother Noyes said, but because of what he did not say. As he sat there thinking of all the formalism and pretense and hypocrisy of a superficial religion which called itself Christianity it seemed to him that Red Hill was full of it, and that no place on earth was better fitted for a real Gospel than right there. And what hope was there for it under present conditions? Four feeble and incompetent churches. No common bond of interest between the town and the country, because there was no common bond among the people of the town itself. A narrow, self−centred, sordid, uninterested town. With good people in it, a minimum of crime and poverty, but also a minimum of positive and affirmative enthusiasm for anything worth while.

And why talk about establishing Christianity over in Europe when in the heart of America there was so little

of it? And why go to New York or Boston and try to influence life with the pen when it was a living voice that the world needed more than the printed page after all? And how could he resign from the ministry into which he went knowing all about its hardships and self−denials? Somehow as that funeral service went on, and he abstracted himself more and more from its concrete and external expression of un−Christianity, his heart and mind flamed up into white heat until when Brother Noyes gently turned to him and asked him to offer a prayer, his whole passionate feeling burst out in a perfect torrent of longing for a vision of God right then and there that would convict and inspire and redeem the people until they would love God and keep His commandments, and learn from the loss of this child of His the mighty meaning of the great, great word, Life.

People who heard that prayer will never forget it. Something about it smote their apathetic consciences as with an angel's wing. One man said afterward, "I don't know what it was, but there was something in what he said that made me afraid of myself." And another said, "I wanted to go home and straighten out my affairs, and ask my wife to forgive me for a cross word I said to her that morning."

Out at the cemetery Howard listened again to the false statement made in all sincerity by good Brother Noyes, "We commit the body here where the spirit shall await the final resurrection." And yet he had already told the family not to mourn because the child was in heaven. The whole thing struck Howard as pagan, and he silently shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, and walked home. It seemed to him he would choke to death if he rode back in the carriage with the mayor and the other pall−bearers. They wondered at his abrupt refusal to be ushered again into the accustomed minister's place, and talked about it on the way back to town, interspersing that subject of conversation with funny stories and the not uncommon commonplaces of distant mourners on the return from the grave.

This was Wednesday. The letter to the editor of the *had been sent the day following little Miss Wilson's death. No one in Red Hill knew the contents of that letter except Howard, Agnes, and Rose. It must be said that when the postmaster at Red Hill cancelled the stamp on that letter, he held it up to the light and wished for an X−ray eye−ball. Postmasters are like other people, and the one at Red Hill was no exception.*

But when Howard walked up into his pulpit the following Sunday, people felt as if something out of the ordinary was coming. A life long habit of watching everybody and dissecting everybody's private affairs had given Red Hill a gift of morbid telepathy, so abnormally keen that it seemed able to detect to a degree any unusual mental excitement, or the symptoms that lead up to a "situation" or a "dramatic climax." The thing came very near being uncanny. It was generally so exact in its diagnosis of what would happen at a public gathering.

The service went on as usual up to the sermon. But the people were not going to be deprived of the expected "event" of the day, for before he began preaching, he stepped out by the side of the little pulpit and eyeing the people seriously he spoke, restraining his own feeling, until the calmness of his voice seemed to deny the real importance of what he was saying.

"I wish to make a statement here to−day which seems necessary to make on account of other statements which have been made, and in order to let the people know what they ought to know.

"There has been submitted to me an offer to leave the ministry and Red Hill, and take up newspaper work. It is not necessary for me to go into details. But all I want to say here this morning is that I have refused this offer to leave the ministry, and will remain here, for a time at least, if this church wishes me to stay."

At that point a thing happened that broke all records in the history of the church.

Some one,−−the Expressman told the Agent next day it was Deacon Allen−−started a feeble hand clap. It was taken up and spread over the church until it grew so loud it waked up old Judge Randolph, the one inveterate, chronic sleeper of the congregation whom no minister, not even Howard, had ever robbed of a nap after the service had been going twenty minutes. He stared around him in surprise, and turned with a bewildered look at his wife. She whispered to him in a loud tone, for the judge was a little, just a little deaf, "Mr. Chase is going to stay."

As soon as the judge caught the meaning of it he joined in the applause, his face beaming with honest delight. For in spite of the fact that he had not heard a sermon clear though for more than twenty years, he never missed going to church and without knowing it himself his habit of napping there had become a source of real satisfaction, and besides, he did like Howard, as he met him between Sundays, and had to acknowledge he was different from all the other ministers in Red Hill.

Howard had planned to say a few more words, but the episode of the applause seemed to make it unnecessary. He paused, as the excitement quieted down, felt an unusual glow of joy over the spontaneous act of the people,

and then gave out his text and began to preach. Even Judge Randolph, jolted out of his customary nap, stayed awake during that sermon, and at its close when Howard came down into the aisle, the judge was the first to greet him as everybody crowded up to shake Howard's hand, and men as well as women had tears on their faces and did not seem to be ashamed of them.

"After all," Howard's own eyes filled as the people crowded up, "they do like me. And I like to be liked. They are sheep without a shepherd. I cannot leave them."

"It was worth ten dollars to be there," the Expressman told the Agent, who had not been able to leave the station because No. 10 was late.

"I suppose that's what you put in," the Agent said.

The Expressman was cautious about committing himself.

"I'm a−goin' to increase my subscription to Mr. Chase's salary. We can't afford to lose him."

"What have you been giving?" the Agent asked with more or less incredulity.

"That's one thing people are not supposed to know," the Expressman replied. "I been guessin' for twenty−five years how much Deacon Allen subscribes, an' I bet I can come pretty clost to it, but I don't know exact."

"You wouldn't have to guess much," the Agent said, as he rose to sell a ticket to Topeka.

When he came back to the window the Expressman said:

"I felt disappointed over one thing yesterday. I was lookin' for an announcement."

"I thought Mr. Chase made one."

"He did, but I thought he'd add a N. B. or a P. S. or something."

"About what?"

"His weddin'. People are gettin' anxious to know when and where it's going to be."

"You won't expect him to advertise that from the pulpit, do you?"

"I bet you would, if you was goin' to get married. You'd be willin' an' glad to stick up a notice in the waitin' room."

"He will do the right thing, Mr. Chase will," the Agent said, as he opened the key for Lawton.

"I've heard the date has been fixed for May 1st. But I hain't heard whether it's at the church, or at Deacon Burton's. They could have it outdoors in May, so everybody could go."

"They won't let you in without a dress suit," said the Agent.

"I'm a−goin' in my wagon," said the Expressman. "So's to get their trunks on time."

"They won't go away, I don't believe," said the Agent. "Unless to Topeka."

"Yes. They ought to go there and call on Governor Capper an' climb up to the top o' the State House dome," said the Expressman, whose dream of a wedding trip did not soar much above three hundred feet high. "I've offered to haul their trunks down to the deepo. An' there won't be no old shoes nor ribbins on 'em either, if I haul 'em."

After the Sunday evening service of that memorable day Howard and Agnes and Rose reviewed the event, and again Howard repeated his reasons for his decision and his plans for the future.

"I answered that letter, as you know, my dears, because I simply could not go out of the ministry. I've figured out we can economise. And Agnes is willing to live the simple life. I can write more. Yesterday I got a check for fifty dollars from the *for a funny story. Think of that, people! Fifty dollars just for one little story of fifteen hundred words. And I believe I can make things go here for awhile. I don't need to sleep eight hours. I can do with six, and—−"*

"Isn't he wonderful, sister?" Rose whispered to Agnes. And Agnes Burton simply nodded. She could not trust herself to speak. Howard was striding across the little room, his eye flashing, his arms tense but not nervous, his whole body keeping time with his mind, the physical glory of his being illustrating in a subtle manner his inner and spiritual self, and Agnes Burton was fascinated yet humbled at the sight of him, as he gently moved, not a rough expressing of coarse fibre, but a sense of power which faced great odds and dared them to overpower him. And over and above all, she rejoiced in his decision to remain in the ministry, and she was ready without reserve or shrinking to share with him fully in all that the decision might mean to them both.

During a part of that evening Rose discreetly disappeared at intervals, and in one of them Agnes said to Howard demurely:

"Do you think a man and−−and−−his wife, ought to share everything−−troubles, secrets, plans er−−everything

with each other?"

"Certainly I do!" replied Howard positively. "It is the only basis of happy married life. There is no other."

"Would you say that if one of them had something that had been accumulating for several years, a−−a−−certain thing that was hard to handle that really belonged to the the Home they were both building that a thing like that ought to be shared?"

"It most certainly ought. Neither party ought to refuse to accept from the other anything that might be offered. A perfect sharing of everything, no secrets, no inequalities of any kind ought to give one an advantage over the other."

"Very well, then, my lord," said the school teacher, her cheeks glowing and her eye sparkling, "I have something I want to share with you. It is something which has been accumulating through the years and belongs to the Home we are planning to build together. Neither of us ought to refuse from the other anything that might be offered. We are perfectly agreed on that basis for a happy married life. There is no other."

And with the words she suddenly put into Howard's hands a little bank−book, with her name on the outside.

He took it, a look on his face so bewildered that she wanted to laugh, only she was a trifle afraid, as she watched him. Mechanically he opened the little book at a place where a slip of paper had his name written on it, a check, making payable to Howard Chase the sum of one thousand two hundred and seventy−five dollars and sixty−two cents and endorsed by the school teacher's signature.

"It is my dowry," she said, as he turned a questioning gaze upon her. "It is one−half of my savings of several years, and it is just as much yours as mine. I will not come to you unless you take it. You have asked me to give you myself, and I have given. And this simply goes with me. You cannot have one without the other. You said we ought to share everything. And we will, won't we?"

Rose had just opened the kitchen door but she gently stepped back and closed it, and waited a reasonable time.

When she re−entered she said:

"Have you been quarrelling?"

"Yes, and made up," said Howard promptly. But he was still agitated unusually.

"I thought you had made up all right," said Rose, smiling. "What was the row about?"

Agnes told her, smiles and tears succeeding, finishing with a contagious laugh as she described Howard's expression when the bank−book fell into his hands.

"At least, madam, give me credit," he said sternly, "for not knowing you had all this wealth when I proposed to you? If I had known it, it would have made me hesitate. I have always been afraid of these rich girls. You cannot deny I thought you were as poor as most Kansas school teachers."

"I am the richest woman in the world," she said, eyeing Howard with the look of the hero worshipper.

"Is it time for me to retire again?" asked Rose unblushingly. "I haven't a thing to do in the kitchen, but I can go out and rattle the stove lids or pump up some water."

"Don't go, sister, stay and help me to settle this question. Do you think I ought to take this money?"

"Of course I do," said Rose promptly. "Take all you can get. You can give your wife a dollar or two once in a while if she really needs it."

"I'll take it then, on that condition," he said gently. And in perfect confidence and implicit love the man and the woman there pledged anew their betrothal.

Red Hill will never forget the occasion of the wedding when Howard Chase and Agnes Burton were married on the first day of May that year. Howard had always had a horror of display at weddings and funerals. Agnes shared his feeling. If they had consulted their own wishes they would have been married quietly at Deacon Burton's home, and walked over to the parsonage afterwards.

But they both realised that the public had some claim on them and finally agreed to have the service in the church and, if the weather was kind, to have a reception out on the lawn. When the announcement was finally made, it was so general that the phrase "the friends of Mr. Chase and Miss Burton are invited" covered all necessary conditions.

"There wa'n't nothin' said about dress suits," the Expressman told the Agent. "You can wear your everyday clothes and be welcome."

"How about presents?" asked the Agent.

"Not a word. No flowers either, nor poems. But I think you ought to give Mr. Chase that one about `The

Bachelor.' His wife would frame it."

"I've got something to give them," the Agent said with a grin, and an unusually pleased look.

"Tell me," said the Expressman, pleadingly.

"I will, if you won't tell any one."

And the Agent leaned out of the window and whispered something to the Expressman who nearly lost his balance when he heard it.

"You don't say!" he exclaimed as he gazed at the Agent with an added look of respect.

"Yes, I do. And I don't want you to say it to any one."

"I won't even tell it to the horse," the Expressman solemnly promised.

"Nor the wagon," the Agent added.

"Nor the wagon," the Expressman echoed.

The night of the wedding was a perfect Kansas May night. Brother Noyes performed the ceremony in the church which was packed with all of Red Hill that could get in, and the rest stood out on the lawn, "like the crowd at Senator Woodbine's funeral," as the Expressman said, "only different." The church chorus sang appropriate music. And the church furnished the refreshments out on the lawn to everybody. If there was a boy in Red Hill who did not get three dishes of ice cream that night he has not been discovered. The farmers came in for fifteen miles around, and came up and shook Howard's hand as he stood proud and handsome by the side of the school teacher. "The finest looking couple in the state!" the Washburn College graduate farmer told a neighbour, the college farmer who had told Howard on the occasion of his visit that he and his wife required the refinements of worship in order to make them go to church. This man seemed unusually thoughtful during the evening, and twice took occasion to tell Howard he was glad he had decided to remain in Red Hill.

When the evening was finally over and the last guest gone, Howard and his wife and Rose went over to the parsonage. Rose had kept open house there, presiding over the presents and showing them to the crowd that all during the evening made a procession through the rooms.

"Look out there!" said usually quiet Rose, but tonight she radiated electric excitement in four directions.

She led the way to the kitchen, and waved her hand around.

"There! Mrs. Chase! Talk about the high cost of living! There's groceries to burn, for a month!"

"I hope some one remembered to send us a can opener," said Howard, as he looked at the display of canned goods which covered the kitchen table several feet high. While groceries and vegetables of every description were piled on the floor through which Rose had made lanes leading to closets and doors.

"We can begin here by the stove and eat our way over to the sink, and then start over there by the cupboard and by the middle of next week we can get to the cellar door," said Rose, as she led the way back into the sitting−room to direct the bride and groom's attention to presents brought in that evening which they had not yet seen.

Among them was a long envelope containing an interesting communication from the trustees of the church.

DEAR BROTHER:

In view of your faithful and efficient services since you came to us a year ago, and as a slight token of our appreciation of your sacrifice in remaining with us, the Trustees and the church ask you to receive the enclosed, and also wish to inform you that a meeting of the church held last night it was voted to increase your salary this year to twelve hundred dollars.

Wishing you and Mrs. Chase great blessing, we are,

Very sincerely yours, H. S. ALLEN, Chairman Board of Trustees. R. F. BURTON, Senior Deacon.

A check for one hundred dollars was attached to the letter. But the surprising thing about it all to Howard and Agnes was that the church could hold a meeting, vote such an increase, and no whisper of it reach them until now. And as a matter of fact, the event surprised Red Hill as much as any one. For once in its history it managed to bring about a genuine surprise for itself.

Howard and Agnes examined other presents, a really bewildering display, and as they finally went into the study where Rose had put certain articles, Howard found a letter in the middle of his desk, with the familiar Santa Fe mark on the envelope.

The typewritten address disclosed the identity of the author.

"Ah! My friend, the Agent! I recognise his typewriting!" said Howard. "Come here, Mrs. Chase, I have an inspiration this is for you as well as me."

And he was right. The Agent enclosed his poem on "The Bachelor," to which was pinned a check for ten dollars bearing the *printing. The Agent's note said:*

DEAR Mr. AND Mrs. CHASE:−−

The enclosed verses will be published sometime in the . *They got past Mr. Bok while he was asleep at the switch, and he made out the check before he was wide−awake. Please accept the same with my Best Wishes. May you have a pleasant and profitable journey over the Matrimonial Road, and meet with no wild circus trains on the trip. May your signals burn clear and your orders give you the right of way over the Sunday excursions. If you should ever travel on a real railroad let me recommend the Santa Fe. It is the only road running into Red Hill and on that account the only road running out again. It's rule is `Safety First,' and I hope you will never take it to go out of town without buying a round trip to come back.*

Your friend, THE AGENT.

Howard, with his arm about Mrs. Chase, the two handsome heads close together, read out loud the Agent's literary effusion which had managed to break into the *at an expense to the unguarded moments of Mr. Bok of ten dollars.*

"He belonged to the Bachelor class, And every day he was heard to say, `It's a weary world! Alas! Alas!'

"He's no more in the Bachelor class, Because he has found, By looking around In this weary world, A lass. A lass."

As he finished reading, Howard looked around at the lass and you can guess what he did.

"Thank God! I *found a lass! May He make me worthy of her!" was his prayer that happy moment.*

And, O yes, we had nearly forgotten the Expressman's gift. All through the evening, in between the unnumbered refreshments he managed to get acquainted with, the Expressman had been seen at times hovering dimly on the outskirts of the lawn, where Howard thought he could catch an outline of the horse and wagon out in the road. When he took his turn to extend congratulations to Howard and Agnes he said: "Mr. and Mrs. Chase, if you are going to go off on a trip, I'll haul your trunks down to the station for nothin' and glad to do it. And I'll sit on 'em all night to keep the boys from doin' anything to 'em until you get away."

Howard thanked him heartily and told him not to tell any one, as it was not known, but he would make him the custodian of a secret. The plan was to go to Topeka in a day or two, but Mrs. Chase and himself did not wish to let it generally be known.

The Expressman was so gratified over this act of confidence that he kept the secret absolutely for more than an hour. Then he managed to circle around the yard in between the refreshments until he found Howard again.

"Mr. Chase," he managed to whisper hoarsely, partly caused by his frequent helpings to the refreshments and partly due to the mental strain he was under, "would you mind if I told the Agent about that trip? I'll just bust if I can't tell some one. And he and I work the trip business together. He might like to know a little ahead so's to make out your tickets, you know."

"You have my permission, all right," said Howard gravely. "Tell him to be sure to make out the tickets via Pauline."

And that evening, after coming out of the study with the Agent's poem, Howard stumbled over a suit case which stuck out behind the edge of the casing. It was from the Expressman and it represented considerable savings. Rose silently eyed it with some disapproval, as it was not made of the highest priced leather. But Howard said:

"We'll have to go on that trip now, anyway, or it will be the disappointment of his life. And I'll be proud to carry his suit case all the way."

And so it came to pass he did. And Agnes and he had the satisfaction of getting out of Red Hill so quietly that there was hardly any one down at the station but the Agent and the Expressman, who sat on the trunks until the train came in, and showed the greatest pleasure at the sight of the suit case which Howard insisted on holding prominently in front of him as he bade the Expressman good−bye.

They spent a blissful week in Topeka, called on Governor Capper, who asked them to come again, climbed up to the top of the state house dome so they could tell the Expressman about the view, went out to Washburn College and admired the view of Burnett's Mound so much from the campus that they finally walked out there and

were rewarded with the sight of a wonderful sunset, spent a part of the one hundred−dollar check on Kansas Avenue, and returned to Red Hill on No. 5 where the Expressman greeted them with a receptive smile and insisted on taking their trunks up to the parsonage free of charge.

And then Howard and his wife settled down to the regular church and parish life.

It was the happiest, most divinely human period of all their lives, and they were profoundly and unquestionably glorified together. But all that did not obscure or hide or minimise certain facts which Howard's one year's experience had already sharply impressed upon him.

The four churches fought for their existence in a pitiful way. Try as hard as he could, Howard could not conceal the fact that as the weeks and months went on, his task really grew no easier, and in spite of all the spiritual vision the people had received, the town had no community spirit. One day in July when the heat of the Kansas summer was over the prairie, Brother Noyes came past the parsonage yard, where Howard was sitting out under one of the box elders, trying to shape up a sermon.

The Methodists had not rebuilt. The days had gone by, and they had worshipped part of the time in the other churches and part of the time in the movie show place, which Jake Seymour had let them have for a small rental. But to Howard's surprise the contemplated new church did not materialise, and according to his own uninquisitive habits, he had not ventured to quiz Brother Noyes about it.

He stopped now, and at Howard's invitation took off his coat and sat down.

"I suppose you've wondered, Brother Chase, why we haven't begun to build, after all this time?"

"I have wondered, but I did not count it any of my business," said Howard, who, Agnes said, had less curiosity than any human being that ever lived.

"Well, the plain fact is, Brother, we have had some trouble with the Mission Board. Things have dragged along, and we have been encouraged to hold on, but no funds are forthcoming and we have been put off so long now that we begin to think the Board does not intend to do anything. We are not able to build without help, and"−−he lowered his voice "do you know, the business men are beginning to hold back on subscriptions. Men like Deacon Burton and Mr. Wilson are beginning to complain about the number of churches in a small town. Of course," Brother Noyes added, with a sad smile, "I read enough to know what is going on among the churches in America along the line of federation, and all that. And to tell the truth, my dear Brother, I think the Community idea will have to prevail for the preservation of the church itself, I mean all churches, but until some of my older people die, or get converted, I don't know how it will be possible here in Red Hill."

They talked over the situation a long time, and to Howard's great surprise, when Brother Noyes opened his heart to him he found the older man was in perfect sympathy with Howard's plans, which were taking shape along the line of some sort of union effort that would lift the community out of its commonplaces and give the churches some right to exist.

About this time in Howard's and Agnes's experiences came interesting letters from Mr. and Mrs. Lennox concerning Inez. They had kept them informed about Inez from the beginning, but these July letters brought some new developments.

Mrs. Lennox wrote: "Inez is a remarkable girl in many ways. She is child and grown woman at the same time, and is a creature of moods and sometimes of passion. She has absorbed the city life as if she had always lived here. I shudder to think what might have become of her if she had come to New York by herself. She tells us that the only thing that has kept her from doing wrong is her thought of us. That is reward enough for all the care and anxiety we have felt for her.

"We have discovered that she is genuinely fond of little children. That is a great virtue. But we have also discovered, or rather she has discovered for herself, that she has a gift for children's stories. Roy suggested to her lately that if she could put some of these stories into a scenario, the film companies here might do something with them. She has become deeply, even passionately enthusiastic over the suggestion, and is spending nearly all her time over a child's story illustrating the growth of two children living in exactly opposite conditions. She has met at Edison's a young photographer who seems to understand her perfectly, and he says he will help her in any way he can to visualise her story if it is accepted for the picture play. His name is Andrew Morris, and he is, I think, one of the plainest looking men in New York. But Inez never seems to think of it, only being interested in his photography which is of a peculiar kind. The young man himself is all right. And his plainness of feature is offset by a beautiful voice. No, I don't think Inez will fall in love with him, but I can't answer for the other thing.

"Inez has the making of a beautiful, useful, happy woman. We are doing all we can for her. If she should succeed in her story effort, it may determine her whole future. She will stay on with us as long as she is willing to be with us. We have come to love her as if she were indeed our very own."

July slipped into August and August into September and September into fall and the glory of the prairie flooded Red Hill with matchless days and nights. And Howard's church problems grew with each succeeding month. He had all through the summer made careful study of the town and the country surrounding. His survey had given him certain clear and definite conclusions. And standing out above everything else, always was the plain fact that the churches were not doing what they ought to do, and above all that Red Hill had no community conscience or consciousness, and life was commonplace, and dreary and wasteful and narrow and tasteless to most of the seven hundred inhabitants.

He studied the thing from every angle. Had long talks with Agnes and Rose and Deacon Burton. He went out again, more than once, to see the young Washburn College graduate farmer, and after every visit left behind him a more deeply interested and thoughtful man. But as November slipped away and December began, he was no nearer his dream of the Best Thing for Red Hill, which stood there on the Kansas map, bathed in the lingering autumn which paid no attention to the calendar but continued on pushing winter up into spring and calmly refusing to make even the approaching Christmas−tide put on its frost rimmed garb and its steam heated holiday habit.

CHAPTER XII

It was Saturday night and Agnes and Rose had left Howard in the study, while they had gone down on the street to do a little shopping. Saturday night had always been a sacred time with Howard, whose habits demanded quiet for that period, on up into the late hours, in preparation for Sunday preaching.

To−night he was unusually abstracted and introspective. He sat gazing at the Christ, his whole being stirred to do and be as a disciple. But at the heart of his desire sat, grim and unmoved, this Red Hill problem of a community spirit. What good had his preaching done? The town was in the grip of tradition. The churches were a burden to the people, not a help. The very fact of so many, spoke of the failure of their definition of Christianity. It was a reproach to the Master, a denial of his prayer that they might be one. And his own efforts were wasted. His own success spelled failure for his brethren in the ministry. Was it worth the effort? What hope to bring together a community that had no together spirit.

His soul gathered more and more in abstraction, removed from his outward surroundings and he had never been more completely isolated, when he was startled by a loud ring at the door. He started up and almost running out into the sitting−room, opened the door and confronted Lida's father, Mr. Wilson.

"May I see you a few minutes, Mr. Chase? I know it's Saturday, but—−"

Howard warmly greeted him and ushered him into the study.

Mr. Wilson was a small, unobtrusive man, owner of the elevator and flour mill at Red Hill. Everybody said he had lots of money, but few people except the wheat sellers had ever seen much of it. He had several times that summer and fall, in brief chance meetings with Howard, hinted at something in the way of a memorial to little Miss Wilson, but not even in his wildest dreams had Howard imagined so great a thing as quiet Mr. Wilson now proposed. He did it in a very few words.

"Mr. Chase, I have heard you speak more than once of a Community Centre in Red Hill, a building into which all the people could gather for the common interests and where various enterprises could be carried on like Boy's Club work, gymnasium, Reading−room, Lecture Hall, Music, town administration, and so forth could all be housed, a place the people could call their own, and into which and out of which could centre the interested life of the place.

"Well, Mrs. Wilson and I have talked it over. We will start that idea by giving towards such a building the sum of five thousand dollars, as a memorial to Lida. You were her greatest friend, outside the family. We feel as if this building would represent not only a memorial to our child, but be something you would know how to plan and carry on for the common good. Will you undertake this matter, if we can find others to join us, as I believe we can? For ten thousand dollars we ought to be able to put up the proper building and equip it."

If Mr. Wilson had come into his study and proposed to Howard that they unite to start a joint in Red Hill and send for a carload of beer at once, Howard could not have been more astounded. He was so overwhelmed by the fact of his longing coming true that for a few seconds he stared at Mr. Wilson without a word. Next minute he had him by the hand, and trying to voice his feelings. Next minute, with his accustomed energy, he had seized a piece of paper and was sketching out in the rough his thought of the Building and the various things to go into it. When Mr. Wilson finally went away, after modestly disclaiming any credit for his part in the memorial, he left behind an excited young minister, pacing the little room exultantly, his heart singing hallelujah.

He could not compose himself to his sermon−making at once, but he had gone back to his desk to sit down, when the bell rang again. This time, to his surprise, it was the young Washburn College graduate farmer. He had never called on Howard before, but now he apologised as Howard eagerly and in anticipation of something unusual, took him by the arm and drew him into the study.

When they were seated, the farmer said, gazing with deep earnestness at Howard:

"Mr. Chase, I owe you more than one apology for my selfish lack of cooperation in your plans for Red Hill, but the thing has been coming to a head with me all through the summer and fall, and I saw your light as I was driving home, and felt the impulse to come in and consult with you over a scheme following out your own idea of a Community Centre where we can head up all the interests of the people, in town and country. During the last two years I have been greatly prospered. I have talked over this with my wife, who is as you know a Washburn

graduate. And we have agreed to put in, say, two thousand dollars to start with towards this community idea, helping to raise a building, if that is your thought, and really doing something to tie up the common life interests of all the people in town and out. We want to give a better account of our stewardship as educated Christians. We want to prove to ourselves at least, that we are worthy of our Alma Mater and doing something to express our gratitude for all she did for us. We don't know how to do it better than in this way. I want to counsel with you about it."

Howard sat staring at him open mouthed. If the Washburn graduate had proposed that he and Howard start a gambling hall down on the street over the post office he could not have been more bewildered. When he recovered himself he told the farmer about Mr. Wilson. Two excited young men got up and gripped each other's hands. As each of the men had been athletes in college the grip was fairly successful as a grip. Then they sat down and talked it over.

The farmer had been gone only a few minutes when Agnes and Rose came in. Without a word Howard put an arm about each and whirled them bewildered round and round. Then to prove he was not drunk or crazy he told them the fairy story of Mr. Wilson and the Washburn College graduate farmer. An excited parsonage group had little sleep that night. Howard swept his proposed sermon into the waste paper basket and next morning went into his pulpit and preached the Community plan in a fiery, enthusiastic, but not visionary sermon that kept Judge Randolph awake most of the time and everybody else all the time, and closed in a thrilling announcement of Mr. Wilson's and the farmer's offer.

It was so great a surprise that the people took it in dead silence. Then they applauded. The Expressman told the Agent as they walked home that he never knew Mr. Wilson was worth over ten thousand dollars.

"That's going to be some building, accordin' to Mr. Chase. I gathered he intends to have everything in it except a joint. He plans a caverterium and a movie and a swimmin' hole for the kids and I don't know what all. We'll all have to subscribe. Better get a move on your typewriter. Maybe you can get past Mr. Bok again, when he ain't lookin'."

Matters moved fast after that memorable Sunday. The whole town woke up as never in its history. During the week following Deacon Burton subscribed one thousand dollars. Judge Randolph and his wife put in five hundred. But the surprise of the town was Deacon Allen. He came to Howard the next day after the sermon and put in his hand a check for two thousand dollars to be put into the library part of the building, stipulating that no other editions of the Bible go into it except the King James.

It was the most exciting week Red Hill ever knew or ever will know. Before another Sunday the ten thousand dollars had been subscribed and more kept coming in from the country due to the efforts of the Washburn College farmer who kept his machine hot in a county canvas, and Howard called a mass meeting of the town to construct a committee, seek for plans, and consult generally.

There were some croakers and opposers. There always are for every plan ever proposed for human betterment. But Howard's enthusiasm, tempered by a great fund of practical common sense, had the right of way. The Community idea had the right of way, and the town for once in its life sat down to a feast of imagination spread with the promise of idealism come true. Why are some people so afraid of the millennium coming to pass? Is anything more useful than the ideal, or more idealistic than the useful?

There was a good deal of speculation as to what would become of the churches under this community idea. Howard steadfastly held to the opinion that that problem would work out in time and his opinion proved singularly true. Elder Noyes, after a series of experiences with the Board which do not belong to this story, was on the point of resigning from the ministry when Howard prevailed on him to stay on in Red Hill and take charge of one of the departments in the Community House. He proved to be unusually efficient as the Librarian and Director of Reading. Brother Harris, who had a gift with boys, gradually worked into the general management of the Play Grounds and Boys' Club Department. And Brother Grey, after various experiments, proved his great usefulness in directing the Lecture and Musical Courses which have made Red Hill famous in Kansas. The churches did not combine at first except in a real union of common service in the Municipal and Community House. The Methodists, after endeavouring to hold together and even rebuild without the help of the Board, gradually came into Howard's congregation. One of the potent factors in this was the refusal on the part of the business men to subscribe to all the churches as they had done for years. And as time went on the plan of heading all the church organisations up into one, gained more and more favour, so that within the next two years plans

were under way to perfect that organisation.

History was made fast during those two years. George Clark gave a vacant lot next his printing office, on the main street. The Building went up, under the careful supervision of the Committee, the whole town looking on, and the Expressman in particular spending leisure time, of which he had a large and unused quantity, in seeing that everything was according to specifications. And when it was finally completed, one night, Red Hill collectively, every man, woman and child, went into it and proudly raised it belonged to the whole town and the country. That was a great evening in its history, and its climax, every one agreed, came when after a great talk by Howard, explaining the plan and purpose of it all, the Washburn College graduate farmer, in a neat speech, presented Howard and his wife with a beautiful framed photograph of the Building, and a testimonial signed by nearly everybody as a token of their appreciation of what they had done. For the first time in his life Howard could not command his feelings. He broke down and received the picture in silence, tears on his face as he stood there by the side of his wife.

One other significant event must be recorded of general and peculiar interest to all Red Hill, that centred into the Building, and that was the night, one year later, when Jake Seymour proudly and with an excitement that threatened to set the booth and all its contents on fire, put on in the Assembly Hall the Children's Play written by Inez, accepted by Edison's, photographed by Andrew Morris and passed by the new Kansas State Censorship Commission under the new law passed by the legislature of 1917.

The play itself was called "The Other Child," and Inez, remembering the Agent's literary ambitions, had asked him to write the verses that served as a Prelude. The theme was national prohibition and it was wonderfully worked out with the photographs of Morris, who sat by the side of Inez that night, and all Red Hill knew that Inez was going to marry him sometime that winter, and wondered that such a girl as Inez would take up with such a plain−faced man. But as Inez, said to Howard and Agnes during her visit, the Lennoxes also coming on to see Inez' triumph, "Mr. Chase, I love Andrew because he first taught me, next to you, the real value of things, and I am happy with him, yes, really so."

And the Expressman confided to the Agent:

"You never can tell what these good−lookin' girls will do. That photographer fellow takes the first prize for looks. The first look is enough. But Inez I reckon has enough for both, an' if she's happy, Red Hill won't object."

The Agent's verses outlined the purpose of the play. He himself read them, as they came down on the screen, in a dream to think they were really his.

They are dying on plain and on mountain, By the river, in trenches, at sea; They are rotting, unburied, blood−clotted, Where Mars smites his victims in glee; But oh, little sister of mine, to−day In my country at peace with the world, With our flag of freedom unfurled, What is this we are trying to slay?

They are strong, they are men in their might, They have grown to the stature of men, They are fighting with strength against strength, They can suffer again and again; But oh, little sister of mine, so sad, In my country at peace with the world, With our flag of freedom unfurled, What is this we are killing, greed−mad?

They are dying in Flanders and Poland, They are killing and maiming like brutes, They are filling all earth with their horror, They are reaping. Death's toll of red fruits; But oh, little sister of mine, over here, In my country at peace with the world, With our flag of freedom unfurled, What is this that can kill a child's tear?

In the Mart of this country of mine We are killing the children, not men, They can die, as they have in the past, They can suffer again and again; But oh, little sister of mine, so wee, In my country at peace with the world, With our flag of freedom unfurled, What is this we are killing with glee?

For we license the selling of that Which all through the ages has slain The bodies and souls of the children, In its hellish red battle of gain; But oh, little sister of mine, so wee, In my country at peace with the world, With our flag of freedom unfurled, We can, and we will, set you free.

There was an immense crowd in the Hall that night, and Howard, Agnes, Rose, Roy, Kate, Inez, her father, Andrew, as they had begun to call him, Deacon Burton, Mrs. Burton, Deacon Allen, the Agent and the Expressman were all together in one section, intensely interested in Inez, first photo film play, when Jake Seymour put his hand out of the little opening of the booth and Howard turned in alarm as a puff of smoke—−

When he looked up and saw Agnes laughing and rumpling his hair and saying, "Are you going to come out of that trance? Rose and I were later than we expected. I just peeped in here to see how the sermon was coming on and saw you were a thousand miles away—−"

Howard stared at her in perfect bewilderment.

Then he said slowly:

"What day is it?"

"Saturday, you foolish boy."

"I mean what day of the year."

"Why, it is December 9th."

"Year what?"

Agnes looked at him in some alarm.

"1916. What is the matter?"

"I thought it was two or three years more. Mrs. Chase—−" He drew her down into his lap. "I have had the most wonderful vision. Listen to me. Wait! Ask Rose to come in−−I must tell it before I forget it."

Rose came in and Howard told them. They laughed and cried together. But before he was through he had made up his mind. And when he walked into his pulpit the next morning he told the people his dream.

It made a profound impression. At the close of that day, after all the services at the church, Howard and his wife, who were generally the last to come out of the building, came out and walked across the yard to the parsonage. When they came up on the little porch they turned around. Red Hill was there, its lights twinkling, the bluff in dim outline, the signals of the Santa Fe set for No. 3, a clear winter sky, star−set over all, the little church across the yard white in the darkness, the faint flutter of some prairie feature out on the section road. And Howard, Agnes by his side, looked up and after a moment he said:

"Why may not my dream come true for Red Hill?"

"I believe it will. Let us work and pray to make it real," his wife replied.

They stood there silently a moment and then went into the parsonage.

"Isn't it rather cold out there to be courting?" said Rose as they came in.

"We were not courting," said Howard gravely.

"What were you doing?"

"Dreaming," he answered. And Agnes added−−"Some dreams come true. Maybe ours will."