The Free Press Short Story

THE CHURCH-MAKERS

C. A. STEPHENS

[illegible] went to the Corners [illegible] office for the mail one [illegible], and brought home a [illegible] for the Old Squire.

[illegible] Squire laid this letter beside his plate, for we were just sitting [illegible]. Afterward, when we [illegible], he handed it to me. "I [illegible] there," he said. "Open [illegible] for me, if you will," and I [illegible]. It was dated at a place locally [illegible] as Jericho," thirty or thirty-five [illegible] to the northwest of us, the same [illegible] where I subsequently made my [illegible] as a district schoolmaster. [illegible] coincidence too, the Squire, when [illegible] quite young, had taught a term [illegible] school there.

[illegible] of the letter was [illegible], the spelling queer, to [illegible] cost of it. And as for punctuation, [illegible] was none; it was all in one [illegible] sentence. It ran: "Deer [illegible] you guy tham—" Here I [illegible] to a standstill for some moments [illegible] which, as written, proved to [illegible]; and while I was puzzling [illegible] Grandmother Ruth remarked, [illegible] that she was afraid the Old [illegible] early efforts as teacher in [illegible] had not been entirely successful. [illegible] time I made the word out and read [illegible] aloud that big Bible and hem [illegible] the meetin house here and you [illegible] nobody oughter come and git em [illegible] for the old Sussiety is all broke up [illegible] and moved away and they ain't got [illegible] minister now and the meetin house [illegible] is going to rack and ruin and last [illegible] the river-drivers got in and [illegible] nights thar and Rackerbites has [illegible] to holdin meetings in it and tuff [illegible] goes thar nights to play cards and [illegible] which is a disgraceful and [illegible] I oughter tell ye and have ye come and git them vassels away. Your friend and welwisher Amasa Green."

Before I finished Ellen had glanced [illegible] from her own letters and was laughing. Grandmother Ruth, however, was now looking very stern, and the Old Squire thoughtful.

"Yes," he said, "I did give the communion service to the Methodist church there and gave a Bible and hymn book for the pulpit. They asked me to help them, and I did. But that was fifteen years ago. There had recently been a revival of religion in the place. The converts had worked hard to build their little new church, and the Methodist conference had sent them a minister."

"I have always thought it was just as well to give what we have to give to our own denomination," Gram remarked, somewhat austerely.

"All Christians are good people, Ruth," the Old Squire replied, defensively. "That little new society was making a great effort to start a church. I was glad to help them.

"But things have since gone badly with them," he continued. "When the hard times came on after the Civil War, five families left their farms and moved to Haverhill to get work in the shoe factories. I heard, too, that a Mormon missionary induced some of the people to emigrate to Utah. The conference stopped sending them a minister, and the church ran out—like an abandoned farm. It is said that things sometimes turn out that way."

"Well, Joseph, I guess you will have to go over there and get your donation and fetch it home," Gram remarked. "It doesn't seem to be appreciated. And I don't know just what we can do with it, all after you bring it home," Gram continued. "I suppose we shall have to stick it away up garret along with those things you once speculated in." That was a sore subject, and the Old Squire's face relaxed in a rather wry smile. "For of course after being used for the sacrament we couldn't put that flagon and the challices to everyday use here in the house," Gram went on, reflectively.

"Do you remember what you paid for that service?" she asked a few minutes later, she always felt obliged to keep an eye to the family expenditures.

"As near as I remember, the Bible and hymnal were fourteen dollars," the Old Squire said. "I sent to the Methodist Book Concern in New York for them. The flagon, challices and paten were plated ware. I believe they were thirty or thirty-five dollars."

"Well, I think you would better go get them," Gram said, sententiously. "That's too much to be left round amongst river-drivers and Rackabites—whatever they are."

"I think so, too, Ruth," the Old Squire replied, in a conciliatory tone. "I will drive over and look them up. I will go next Monday."

"But what in the world are Rackabites, Julia exclaimed. "Doesn't this [illegible] say the 'Rackabites' have [illegible] possession of the meetinghouse?"

[illegible] Squire looked puzzled. "There [illegible] Rechabites in Scriptural [illegible] I believe," he said, at length. [illegible] there were any of [illegible] country.

[illegible] Sunday and Tuesday [illegible] and next day Uncle [illegible] Rackabites of [illegible] their stumps. The Old Squire [illegible] while they [illegible]

[illegible] an Arab sect, descendants of Jonadab, an Arab chief; but it seemed unlikely that we should discover many Arabs in Maine.

On Thursday morning we rose very early and set off before sunrise. It was a glorious September morning, following the rain. Ellen, I recall, was in high spirits.

By the aid of numerous guideboards we reached Jericho just before one o'clock.

There was no difficulty in entering the old meetinghouse, for the door stood half open and stuck so fast that it could neither be opened farther nor shut. Inside, the edifice was in a sad state of neglect. The pews had been provided with little doors, but most of these were now off their hinges and lying about. Many of the windowpanes were broken, and the blinds hanging awry. The roof, too, had begun to leak, and the stove pipe had fallen.

But on ascending the little flight of steps which led to the pulpit we found the large Bible lying open and the hymnal beside it. The vandals had, at least, respected the Scriptures.

There was a tiny cupboard inside the pulpit, which had once been locked, but now the lock was broken; and it was in this quaint receptacle that we found the communion service: the upright flagon, the two spindle-necked chalices and the broad, flat paten for the little cubes of Eucharist bread.

We wrapped the things up in the tissue paper we had brought for the purpose, and tied up the Bible and hymn book, ready for transportation homeward.

The question of lunch now arose, for we had had a very early breakfast; giving Whistle his oats outside, we fetched in the suitcase and proceeded to refresh ourselves, sitting in one of the pews near the door. We made some haste, for we had a long drive to reach home before dark. Ere we had finished, a slight noise caused us to glance around. Peeping in at the door, stood a girl with flaxen hair all a-tousle, freckled face and blue eyes, round as half dollars—the wildest-looking child I ever saw. "Come in," Ellen said and laughed in spite of herself; and I said, "Don't be frightened." But at sound of our voices, the girl drew back suddenly, and we heard her bare feet running away.

"So we're discovered," Ellen said. "I wonder if that was a youthful Rackabite? By the way she ran, I imagine she has gone to give an alarm."

And so it proved, for while we were packing the service in the suitcase on the steps outside a group of people, not less than ten, men and women, were seen coming along the highway, at a distance beyond the Green farm. Plainly they were hurrying; some of the women were running. Ellen stood up, watching them. "We are evidently the object of that!" said she. "What do you suppose they want? Are they Rackabites? Shall we unhitch Whistle and get away?"

On second thought, we decided to wait and see what they wanted. The oncomers looked even queerer as they approached; the men were short, thick-set fellows, without their coats; the women were in blue calico with up-rolled sleeves, and bareheaded.

"Those are not Americans," Ellen whispered. "They are some kind of foreigners."

The whole party rushed up quite near the steps, then stopped short, exclaiming, gesticulating, evidently in considerable excitement; but what they were saying was, at first, wholly unintelligible to us, except that it was something about the meeting-house and the Bible and the service which they saw in the open suitcase.

"Does any one of you speak English?" I asked, at length, and Ellen put the same question twice. One of the blue-clad, flaxen-haired women nodded. "I spik him," she cried.

"Then tell us what you want," Ellen said.

The woman came forward a step, while the others gased on her admiriingly.

"We tank mak chborch," she enunciated slowly. "We ban haf meenister dim soon, ver soon. We ban mak chborch aw-right. We want dese tings lef."

Ellen attempted to explain that the Bible and communion service belong to the Methodists, who built the church and worshipped there. The woman merely smiled broadly; they all smiled, alternately shaking their heads or nodding in a puzzled way.

In the meantime, Mrs. Amasa Green, with whom we had first spoken on our arrival that day, came forth from her house and approached with laudable intent of bridging "the gulf of speech." "These folks are Finns," she said. "They have just arrived in this country and have settled on the old farms around here. They appear to think that the town or the state owns the meeting-houses, and that the folks who live nearest around them have a right to hold meetings in them. They say that is the way churches are owned in Finland. My husband and I have told them differently, but they don't believe it."

Then she talked with the woman who claimed to speak English, telling her who we were, and why we had come. This she succeeded in making the Finnish woman understand; and the latter communicated it to the others. They seemed quite disconsolate at first and conferred mournfully together for some time.

Meanwhile we put the suitcase in the buggy, unhitched Whistle and prepared to depart. "They are very simple people," Mrs. Green said to us. "I think they are honest and kind-hearted."

"Are they 'Rackabites'?" Ellen asked her. "Is that their religious creed?"

"Oh, that's what my husband calls them," Mrs. Green said, laughing. "Amasa doesn't like them very well; that is, he doesn't like to have them here in place of our former neighbors. I don't know just what their religion is," she continued. "I guess they are Christian people—Lutherans, perhaps. They seem to want the meetinghouse and the Bible."

We bade her good-bye and started to drive away, when the Finnish woman came running after us. "We ban buy!" she cried. "We ban buy dart tings! What you tak?"

"But how much shall we ask?" I queried. "It cost thirty-five dollars, the Old Squire told us."

"Well, it's secondhand," Ellen said, with a droll look. "What if we say twenty-five dollars?"

That appeared not far wrong, and with the assistance of Mrs Green, who had now joined the Finnish woman, we finally made the latter understand what the price would be. Thereupon she hastened back to the others, and anaimated discussion began among them—while we waited. At last, several of the group looked in our direction, and nodded vigorously; then set off on run back along the road.

"That means it's a bargain, I guess," Ellen said, greatly amused as was Mrs. Green. "They are going for their money," she latter said. "They keep it hidden at home in all sorts of secret places. Oh, they are very thrifty people, but simple."

Not so very simple, either, I conclude, for after we had waited there a good while longer the woman and one of the men re-appeared, coming back, with the others trailing after them far in the rear. On reaching us the woman, with many smiles, proffered a roll of one-dollar bills which, on being counted, proved to total no more than sixteen dollars; whereupon Ellen shook her head and told her that nine dollars more were needed, indicating the deficit on her fingers. At that, the woman gased sadly at the man for some moments; they then went back to meet the others, and another long conference in the dead followed. At last they produced four more one-dollar bills, which the woman offered us, with more smiles. But Ellen still shook her head and told off five on her fingers.

Affliction now fell on the whole group. They sorrowed and shrugged together—so long that we finally started to drive away, quite out of patience. But shouts in the rear brought us to a halt. The woman and man again approached, and

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Give Acton Business Men the First Opportunity

Acton's Prosperity Campaign

Every Citizen of ACTON and District is vitally affected by the amount of money kept circulating at home. Read these editorials with care. The suggestions offered therein, if followed, will banish Depression here. Let this list be your shopping guide.

Dollars Spent in Acton Will Remain Home to Boost

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Cater to the
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Our Lines are Too Numerous to Mention. We invite you to come in and inspect our money-saving values.
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KENNEY BROS.
For Over Fifty Years Serving You in Acton
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Work Guaranteed
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Estimates Cheerfully Given
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Everything in Lumber and Builders' Supplies
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YOUR TIRES REPAIRED
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YOUNG ST. Phone 126 ACTON

We Should be as Loyal to Our Community as to Our Home

The business men of Acton listed here are representative in the various branches of merchandise in which they serve you. They are conscious of the fact that thousands of dollars annually are being spent by residents of the town and district out of this territory for merchandise which could be bought in Acton.

The time for consideration of this question could not be more opportune than the present, when business is more or less dull, and money required to operate local business enterprises, furnishing as much local employment as possible. Financial preparedness and conservation should begin at HOME, and can be exemplified in no more far-reaching manner than by real co-operation in this vitally important Trade-in-Acton Movement.

It is generally assumed that your merchant is the only one who suffers when money is spent in other shopping centres. This is not the case, and it is our intention to show definitely not only that a community as a whole thrives and expands in proportion to the amounts of money in circulation therein, but, as well, that each resident is individually effected favorably or otherwise for the same reason.

This movement is no selfish propaganda on the part of these Acton business men who have combined in a co-operative community appeal. These merchants are here to serve you in Acton, and it is urged that you read the brief messages they will give you through these columns each week.

Furthermore, it is suggested that you become acquainted more intimately with your local business men. They are the big taxpayers, and are called upon to help all worth-while community enterprises. Your shopping problems will then become a pleasure and the personal element created by dealing with the man you know assures you satisfaction in all transactions.

The firm resolve to "Give Acton Business Men the first opportunity" will benefit either directly or indirectly every resident of Acton and district.

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CLOTHING AND FURNISHINGS FOR MEN
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Full Course Meals—Deliciously Home Cooked, at All Hours
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Manufacturers of
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We Specialize in Plumbing and Furnace Work
Estimates Cheerfully Given
ALL WORK GUARANTEED
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Buy in ACTON and Build Up Your Town