

UNCLE JOHNNY DODD'S CHURCH.

The Story of the Young Methodist Minister and the Grand, but Humble Old Sexton.

The little white church at Springfield had long been known among the initiated as "Uncle Johnny Dodd's church." Dignified bishops, reading out the appointments on that last heart-shaking evening at annual conference, always read, with a kindly twinkle of the eye, that the Rev. So-and-So was sent to Uncle Johnny Dodd's church, otherwise Springfield Station—and everybody laughed, for in the course of forty-five years, under the itinerant system, a good number of preachers will manage to form an intimate acquaintance with one church.

Generally, the Rev. So-and-So would be some old minister who was alone in the world, to whom Uncle Johnny's church would come as a welcome haven after many storms; but occasionally some young fellow, not yet graduated from under the wing of the presiding elder, would hear his appointment to the place, and turn a bewildered eye on his neighbor.

"Who is Uncle Johnny Dodd, anyhow?" he would ask with troubled forethought. "Biggest man in the place? Man that owns the town?"

"Naw! Uncle Johnny's the sexton," would be the astounding reply. "For forty-five years, now, Uncle Johnny had alluded to himself as the 'sextant,' and had taken such pride in his work as few men ever bring to the loftiest calling. Twice a week, during all that time, on Wednesdays and Saturdays, he had swept and dusted until every inch of floor was speckless and every bit of woodwork shining; on Wednesdays for the evening prayer-meeting, and on Saturdays for the services of the morrow.

There were other and special occasions for which it was his joy to make special preparations. When there was to be a great wedding, for instance, Uncle Johnny was rigorous in directing just where every palm and fern was to go, and which rows of benches were to be tied with white ribbon; and the hired decorators found that it saved time to yield.

"Hain't I been sextant o' this church goin' on forty-six years?" he demanded, if they were inclined to be urgent. "Pity if I don't know how to trim the church for little Belle Harrison to be married, when I polished the font with my own hands, an' filled it with water for her to be baptized when she was a month an' four days old—yes, an' trimmed the church for her mother to be married, too, without nobody's hired help."

These arguments being unanswerable, Miss Belle Harrison, who had been at much expense to hire decorators, was married in a church adorned after Uncle Johnny's own device; but she laughed merrily over it, thanked him in the loveliest manner, and no doubt was just as happy afterwards. Betty Robbins, on the other hand, who had been sorely puzzled to get together her modest trousseau, and had planned to be married quietly at prayer-meeting, gave a little cry of joy when she and her young lover stepped in at the door; for Uncle Johnny had borrowed a cart and gone to the woods, and the church was a bower of wild smiles.

"No, no, honey," said Uncle Johnny, stopping to pat the cheek of the pretty bride. "I warn't goin' to see your mother's baby married with no trimmin's in the church—not while the woods was handy, an' things grovin' in 'em!"

So there was never any young bride so poor but that the church was in brave array for her, and the humblest baby that was ever dowered with a name in Uncle Johnny's church had the font polished until it shone again, and flowers in the vases on either side, if it were only goldenrod or wild snowflakes.

"Jest to give it a good send-off, and to let its mother know folks wishes her an' the baby well," Uncle Johnny always carefully explained to the young ministers, who could not be expected to understand such things.

And then, the Christmas times! Where Uncle Johnny ever managed to find so much holly, none but he could have told; and he was a busy and a happy man, the day before Christmas, showing the decorating committee how to put it up. There was but one thing in the year's work that really saddened him, and that was taking the greenery down after Christmas was over. It seemed like leaving Christmas behind—like forsaking it utterly; and so the holly was never disturbed until toward the last of January, when the withered leaves began to fall from the dried stems, and some of the ladies who were not given to sentiment complained that the church looked like a crow's nest.

So year after year Uncle Johnny had swept and polished the little church, adorned it for weddings, and tolled the sad and solemn bell for funerals. He was a bent old man, with gray hair that curled on his coat-collar, and with one foot that refused to be quite as agile or as willing as the other. Age had been creeping up on Uncle Johnny in these forty-five years.

The very old people sometimes spoke of other changes that the years had brought. They could recall the good old days when the Spirit had moved mightily upon the little church at Springfield; when the Word had been preached with power by Sons of Thunder, now, perhaps, gone on into the land of silence; and the people had not been ashamed or afraid to shout aloud. They remembered, those older ones, how Uncle Johnny, being greatly wrought upon, would sometimes rise up and send out a clarion "Hallelujah!" that was like the clash of cymbals, and was followed by a soaring joy song, which began with "Glory and honor an' power"—and then trailed off into inarticulate remnants of speech—broken words that could not be understood; and then every one knew that Uncle Johnny was lifted into the third heaven.

Nothing of the kind happened now. Most of the old people had died off, and the younger generation took their religious pleasures as they did their temporal ones—calmly, and with due regard to decorum. Uncle Johnny, in his seat in the corner next the pulpit—the Amen corner, people had called it once—listened to the sermon with such a watchful face that young preachers were sometimes discomposed by it, so that they wandered from their subject.

II.

When the Rev. Brice Carter was appointed to "Uncle Johnny Dodd's church," and heard the appointment so read out by the smiling bishop, and noted the laugh that followed it,

his face flushed hotly; for he was a young man, with university honors thick upon him. "We'll send a college man out there and wake 'em up," the presiding elder had said in cabinet meeting; for he had been troubled by the fact that during the past three years Uncle Johnny's church had lost ground in membership.

"I'll unbinge that name from my church first thing!" said the college man—to the professor, who loved him, as he was starting for his new field.

There could be no doubt that he was an interesting lad. The people came out to hear him, and his sermons, replete with well-rounded periods and filled with classical quotations, attracted the young men and women, who crowded all the back benches at every service. The new minister was very well pleased. Uncle Johnny's watchful face had no terrors for him. Indeed, he was rather astonished to find that a man so manifestly ignorant and behind the times should have had the least influence in the church. The Rev. Brice Carter had learned one thing thoroughly in his college course—that sin may be forgiven, but ignorance which violates the rules of syntax is practically unpardonable.

"What we need is to get young blood into the church," he explained to Elijah Vane, one of the stewards. He was standing with his back to the fire, looking down upon the steward, whose middle-aged eyes were full of trouble. "The death of Brother May leaves a vacancy on the board, and if that young lawyer, Frank Tigert, joins us next Sunday, as he has promised, I am going to have him made steward. He'll be a hustler, and that's what we need. And then I'm going to have some young man appointed sexton."

Vane looked up quickly.

"Why, Uncle Johnny has held that place—" he began.

"For forty-five years—I know all about that," said the young man readily. "And therefore he ought to retire. He's getting too old. We need young men, I tell you. Young men are taking the lead in everything these days—business, politics, and everything else. It will be really a mercy to take the work away from that old man and give it to some one who is able to do it!"

The young lawyer joined the church the next Sunday, and was promptly made a member of the board of stewards; and with this ally by his side the young minister fought his fight against Uncle Johnny Dodd, and won. The old man was to be given two weeks' notice, and by that time they hoped to find some one to take his place.

The minister did not take the message to Uncle Johnny himself. He incidentally asked Mr. Vane to call around on the old man on his way home. He felt relieved that an unpleasant duty was done. He went straight to a stationer's, and left an order for some visiting cards to be used in his pastoral work, setting forth that he was pastor of the Springfield Methodist church.

Mr. Vane found Uncle Johnny sitting outside the door of his two-roomed house, carefully mending one of the little red chairs from the infant class-room—the little red chairs that Uncle Johnny had mended with laborious patience for forty years, while those who had sat in them had grown up to have little ones of their own in the infant class. In every grief and awkward terms the steward told Uncle Johnny that he was to be supplanted by a younger man; but Uncle Johnny looked at him and laughed.

"They like to play jokes, them youngsters," he said peacefully. "But la, I don't mind 'em! I believe I'm goin' to git this cheer to hold together for ten or a dozen years longer, after all. It beats everything how them babies does ack the furniture to pieces, bless 'em!" Like the Magians of old, Elijah Vane returned home by another way; and curiously informed the board, next day, that they might appoint another messenger, for the task was not to his liking. Thus moved, three of the older men went down to the little cottage and old Uncle Johnny, with many stumblings and altitudes, that the story was true—that no one was joking—that the minister thought the church would be better served if a younger man were in his place.

Uncle Johnny had the little red chair, which was almost finished, in his lap; and after the first shock he sat there and looked at it. They left him looking at the little red chair.

"The church ain't what it used to be," said the eldest of the stewards as they went home. "Everything's turned around; everything's for show, and nothing for worship. I doubt if the young minister wouldn't like to ave my resignation, so's he could put some young fellow that's never shaved in my place."

Uncle Johnny lived on the outskirts of the town, so that in going to the church he passed a goodly number of the residences of the members. The news of his deposition had come about the town like wild-fire; and within an hour after the stewards visited him with the ill news, people saw him hurrying along toward the little church. He spoke to no one on the way; he seemed to see no one. His face was white and his eyes stared straight ahead. It was only Thursday—there was nothing to be done at the church on that evening—yet there he was going; and those who watched saw him go in there and close the door after him.

A great wave of pity and resentment swept over the town. People who were not given to sentiment found their eyes moist as they saw Uncle Johnny going up alone to the church—that had been his own for so long—the church that he had kept clean and sweet, and had adorned for feast days, through so many long years that he had seemed to become a part of it.

He must have stayed very late—no one saw him come away. On the next evening and the next he went again.

On Sunday the young preacher mounted his pulpit, well satisfied with himself and with the sermon which he had prepared. He delivered it faultlessly, but he was not satisfied when he came down. It was not that the white old face in the Amen corner troubled him, for he had already made arrangements to provide the old man with better employment, as watchman in a bank—and what was the use of all this stir over a mere sexton? It was that the people listened to him coldly; and he found himself preaching at them, instead of to them. Somehow he had lost his hold on them in one short week. It was in vain that he went among them afterward with the winning smile and the cordial hand-shake they had liked at first. Something was between the preacher and his flock. He was very young, and knew little of men; but he began to feel, with keen irritation, that the something was an obscure and ignorant old man, who had no standing and should have had no influence.

The week was half over before he spoke of it to one of his members, whose greeting had been a little icy during the past ten days. "The old man's broken-hearted," said the

member abruptly. "He'll get over it? I tell you, he won't. He's an old man. He isn't saying anything to any one, but there's the look on his face. My wife weeps every time she thinks of it. What do your young men amount to, anyhow? Where is one of them that has the faithfulness and honor and religion that old Uncle's going into the church every night, and spending hours there, all alone—grieving because his work's taken away from him?"

The young minister was not at all pleased with this direct speech.

"Perhaps the old fellow's up to something with the church," he said; and because the member stared at him indignantly, he determined to prove that he was right.

III.

The Rev. Brice Carter had a key to the infant class-room. That very evening, in the sweet springtime gloaming, he approached the church by a side street and let himself in noiselessly and unobserved. The old man had not come yet. The saffron light of sunset streamed in at the western windows; in the east the full moon rose to meet it. The young man sat down in a dark corner, and waited.

An hour had passed, and the glow had gone from the west, before he heard the key turning in the lock. The moonlight streamed through the windows, and from shaft to shaft of moonlight the old man came on, until he stood beneath the pulpit, not ten feet from the silent watcher. The minister peered out curiously. What was the old man going to do? Why was he standing there, his old hat in his hand, apparently staring at the moon? Suddenly Uncle Johnny Dodd fell to his knees, his head thrown back, his face lifted to the moonlit sky.

"Don't let 'em do it, Lord," he cried beseechingly; and he was speaking as if face to face with One Whom the young minister had never yet seen face to face. "I've polished the benches, an' made the font shine for the babies, an' it was all I could do for Ye, Lord. Don't let 'em take it away! Or if they do take it, help me learn not to complain—but it'll be mighty hard! An' anyhow, Lord, ask 'em to let me fix for the brides—specially for the poor ones; an' to keep the little red cheers in order for the babies—for they'd miss old Uncle Johnny. I do believe—an' thank God for that, anyhow!"

The old face glistened as it turned away. Uncle Johnny tottered down the aisle, but at the next path of moonlight he paused and sent another trembling plea to the Friend with whom he spoke face to face; and at the next path of moonlight he paused again. It was a long hour before he went out of the church and the young minister heard the key turned in the lock. How was Uncle Johnny to know that a figure knelt in his place, with bowed head, and cried like one of old?

"Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!" The next day was Saturday—Uncle Johnny's last Saturday of preparation for Sunday. He labored all day, making everything especially bright for the last time; and when the young minister walked into the pulpit that morning he found that a little cross of wood violets hung upon the altar-cloth.

Earlier in the week he had prepared a very eloquent sermon for that morning, dealing largely with the reconciliation between science and scripture; but somehow, after that fleeting glance into the face of the old man in the corner the sermon would not preach itself; and he found himself talking to the people about an old man named Enoch, who "walked with God" in the dim beginning of history. It was not a sermon—it was a burning of incense before the work of old men and women in the life of the church; but as he talked the frozen looks on the faces of the people began to melt away a little. As he closed the great Bible, he stood a moment, and they waited curiously, expecting something more.

"At a meeting of the stewards held yesterday," he said in quiet tones that penetrated every corner of the church, "a meeting that I called hurriedly, because I saw that I had made a mistake, it was unanimously decided to leave Uncle Johnny Dodd in his present position of sexton, and to ask him to accept it as a lifetime position."

A murmur began to go through the church—a murmur filled with sudden tears. The minister's hand was raised—he was about to call for the closing prayer, when he saw that all eyes were on the old man in the corner, who was standing up and beginning to speak. As he spoke, Uncle Johnny walked slowly out of his place, like one in a dream.

"Brethren," he said timidly, with broken utterance, "I don't wonder if ye got a little impatient, for maybe I've been a little slack about my work; but I haven't meant it." Then all at once his voice rose, filled with exultation. "Don't let nobody say from this time on that there ain't no God!" he cried. "Why, I've come to the church every night an' asked Him to let me stay—an' now look at this! He's heard me—He's heard me—He didn't let 'em take it away!"

And then suddenly the bent shoulders straightened, and the dim eyes flashed; and Uncle Johnny Dodd, a transformed man, gave forth a shout that pierced every heart like an arrow.

"Hallelujah! Glory an' honor an' power—" They did not hear the rest. Uncle Johnny was in the third heaven, and seeing things not lawful to be uttered.

The young minister who went down to the next annual conference was a very different young minister from the one who had come up from the last. The old professor who loved the lad—saw what had happened, and asked:

"Let me see—what church have you been serving this year?"

"Uncle Johnny Dodd's church," said the boy with an ingenuous blush; and the professor took his hand.

The Abbey's Great Purpose. As the bus swung down the Strand an American sitting beside the driver asked to be told the spots of interest. "Right you are, sir!" agreed the driver. "There's Luggie 'ill, where they 'ang 'em." "A little later—" "There's Parliament 'ouses, where they made the laws 'ow they do it, across the way. An' there's Westminster Abbey, where they buried the good 'uns wot didn't get 'anged."

How It Became Personal. Celestine—"And has Mr. Pryor's church such a small congregation?"

Hilda—"Yes; indeed. Every time he says 'dearly beloved' you feel as if you had received a proposal."

A lady suffragette says Adam was a loafer and Eve an artist. Well, she was the first designing woman.

Sample copies of the paper will be sent with pleasure upon request.

"AN ELECTION IN JERUSALEM."

The Holy Land is Not Holy by Any Means. With minds accustomed to the purchase of votes as freely as fowl are sold on the market—with taverns wide open and men filling up like beasts on election day,—with one party alone projecting over \$20,000 into a campaign in a city like Kingston, a kind of shock is given by the report of "an election in Jerusalem." The Holy Land is not kept holy by any means, but it has not had many modern things which take away those old characteristics which linked it to Bible days and bred scriptural thoughts.

But Jerusalem's first popular election was decorous. There were two classes of voters, the new order in the Ottoman Empire. Each group of 500 electors chose one man to represent them. These representatives, in their turn, voted for the member. The city was divided into districts, and the names in each district entered on a list given to the vote collector with a closed and sealed box. The collector went from house to house receiving the votes. There had been a deal of canvassing beforehand, but this was done through the press and through personal persuasion rather than from the hustings. The people have not yet realized the power they can wield from the platform. Perhaps orators have not had time enough to grow to the speaking point; Ottomans, long in chains, still think themselves watched and spied upon, and are distrustful of public agitators.

The diversity of creed—Moslem, Christian, and Jewish—is also a drawback. Men cannot but find religion bias their political view. However these are strange and wonderful days, when green-turbaned sheikhs and black-robed Jews, and bright-eyed, active Arabs, join in welcoming the new era! The two members for the Turkish parliament were: Rofi Effendi el Khalidi, who has long been Turkish consul at Bordeaux, France; Said Effendi, a resident of the city, of an old family of the ruling order. Upon their departure for Constantinople to enter upon legislative duties there was a great demonstration of goodwill and patriotic rejoicing over the new representative freedom. The new parliament will not be so perplexed by diversity in creed as by difference in race which is becoming even stronger than religion. There will be the Greek, the Bulgarian, the Servian, the Armenian, the Kurd, the Arab, and the Turk, and each race will strive to dominate the house.

In Brutal Russia.

London Paper. Executions in Russia are proceeding apace, some of them accompanied by terrible scenes. There were seventeen executions on Tuesday, including five at Kieff, five at Ekaterinoslav, and four at Revel. Thirty-seven death sentences are announced, including twelve at Elizabetgrad, nine at Ekaterinoslav, and nine at Warsaw. At one Ekaterinoslav execution (says the "Russ") the rope broke, and the condemned man fell to the ground shrieking. The hangman silenced the man by pressing his foot on his neck.

After Long Years.

In wanderings among the Pyramids of Egypt, Lord Lindsay, the English traveller, came across a mummy, whose inscription proved to be two thousand years old. In one of its closed hands was a small bulb. Wondering how long vegetable life could last, he planted the bulb in a sunny soil, and, to his delight, the root sprouted and developed a beautiful flower. This incident suggested to Mrs. S. H. Bradford these thoughts upon the resurrection:

Two thousand years ago, a flower bloomed lightly, in a far off land; Two thousand years ago, its seed Was placed within a dead man's hand.

Before the Saviour came on earth That man had lived and loved and died, And even in that far off time The flower had spread its perfume wide.

Suns rose and set, years came and went, The dead hand kept that treasure well; Nations were born and turned to dust While life was hidden in that shell.

The shrivelled hand is robbed at last, The seed is buried in the earth, When, lo! the life long hidden there Into a glorious flower bursts forth.

Just such a plant as that which grew, From such a seed when buried low; Just such a flower in Egypt bloomed And died, two thousand years ago.

And will not He who watched the seed, And kept the life within the shell, When those He loves are laid to rest, Watch o'er their buried dust as well?

And will not He from 'neath the sod Cause something glorious to arise? Aye, though it sleep two thousand years, Yet all that buried dust shall rise.

Just such a face as greets you now, Just such a form as here you bear, Only more glorious far, shall rise To meet the Saviour in the air.

Then will I lay me down in peace, When called to leave this vale of tears, For "In my flesh shall I see God," E'en though I sleep two thousand years.

Anniversaries of 1909.

Astrologers would have us believe that in certain years throughout the ages remarkable conjunctions of heavenly bodies and other interrelations so influence the human character and physique that many children born at these times become great and commanding. If so, there must have been remarkable celestial phenomena in 1809, for a surprising number of men and women who have commanded fame first saw the light in that year. There were these American celebrities: Hannibal Hamlin, Park Benjamin, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, Cyrus McCormick, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Abraham Lincoln, Edgar Allan Poe. Among eminent Englishmen were: Charles Darwin, William E. Gladstone, Alfred Lord Tennyson, John Stuart Blackie, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Edward Fitzgerald, and Alexander W. Kinglake. In the same year Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy was born in Austria, Pierre Joseph Proudhon in France, and Frederic Francois Chopin in Poland. There are to be celebrations in England and America and throughout the civilized world, of some of the anniversaries. The Protestant peoples will take note of the four-hundredth anniversary of John Calvin, who was born in Switzerland in 1509. England will commemorate the bicentenary of old "Sam" Johnson, who first saw the light two hundred years ago. United States will make commemoration of the Fulton steamboat triumph, begun in 1807, and the discovery of the Hudson River in 1609, besides celebrating, with Canadian neighbors, the discovery of Lake Champlain by the old French navigator in 1609.

The Forward Movement.

The Young People's Missionary Movement has held institutes at Toronto, Montreal, Brantford, Peterboro and Galt, to follow up the good work of the Laymen's Missionary Movement. It is proposed to hold institutes this winter in a number of other cities, and Rev. A. E. Armstrong is making a tour to arrange plans and dates.



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SNATCHED FROM THE GRAVE

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The Immortals. Paris Figaro. At a meeting of French academy a short time ago the "Immortals" had assembled and were conversing informally on the subject of the election of a new member when a well known writer entered the room. He greeted his colleagues, who smiled broadly upon him. Presently the smiles became laughter and it dawned upon the moment that it was the son who died, said: "You are the more to be pitied because he was your only one."