

I'VE BEEN THINKING

By Charles Battel Loomis

The editor of the paper was an agnostic. Fifty years ago he would have been called an infidel, but we have softened our speech in some ways. Now, although he was an agnostic and really knew nothing of a future life, he was the editor of a live paper and he had to observe the times and seasons; therefore, when by the calendar he saw that Easter was near at hand, he determined to get up an Easter number, sparing no expense to make it something that would appeal alike to art lovers and to the multitude.

But, although the editor was an agnostic, it is not to be understood that he was a bad man. This is not a fable, where everything is told in symbols, and where all the characters are types. He was a good man, a kindly man, and if men get into heaven by good deeds alone (and there are those who say they do) this agnostic was certain of a happy immortality. Can you imagine a more pleasant surprise than for a man to die an agnostic, after a well spent life, and to awake a celestial being, knowing for a fact what he had all his life doubted?

Among his corps of writers there was a young Hindoo with one of those names that rouse laughter among the unthinking. In the office, where he was cordially liked, he was called "Dan" for short, and that name will do as well as his own. He was a word poet, and he handled the English tongue with an ease that many an American envied.

The Hindoo was also a good man, although that is neither here nor there. He could project himself into a subject until his whole being was saturated with it, and he had written a Russian story that more than one Russian expert attributed to Turgenieff. He could do anything in words and he could weave you a story of the Norse mythology and set it forth in a dress of brighter colors than would have been possible to a man of Scandinavian imagination. So when the editor was casting about for the proper person to write him an Easter allegory he turned naturally to "Dan." And he sent for him and said to him quite seriously: "I want you to write me an allegory about the Resurrection. I want something that will appeal to church people. Nothing theatrical, but simple and human. You understand?"

"I understand," said this young Hindoo, and he went to an art gallery and looked at those pictures that would help him, and after that he went to his lodgings and cast himself upon the floor and gave his imagination free play for an hour, and then rose and wrote the allegory in an hour and then wrote it once again; and after that he let it alone, for he knew that every added touch would take something of spontaneity from it.

So he brought it to the editor, who read it through and said quite seriously: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The allegory having been written, it remained to have it illustrated, and now for once the editor had some thought of the fitness of things, and he said to himself, "I must get a Christian to illustrate this," and he called his artists in and said to each one in turn, "Are you a Christian?"

And it was astonishing the answers he received. Most of the men growled out a negative; some blushed and said nothink, but none gave an affirmative answer until he came to a young Catholic, who said modestly, but in a manly tone, "I hope so, sir."

"Well, Michael, you won't be able to illustrate this story, as it is entirely out of your line. I want a picture of the Resurrection, and the public would think it sacrilege if your pen, which is always associated with comic work, should do this."

"I guess they would, sir," said Michael.

"Well, then, I'll have to get one of you men that aren't Christians to do it."

Then one of the artists spoke up and said:

"Well, we may not be Christians, but we aren't anything else. That is, we used to go to church when we were kids."

"That's so," assented several.

"But," said the editor, "I don't think any one of you can do the kind of work that will fit the story that 'Dan' has turned in. It's too good for so ephemeral a thing as a newspaper and it ought to go into a magazine and be illustrated by an Elihu Vedder or some other great symbolist—meaning no disrespect to you boys."

"Ignace Borowski can do it, Mr. Paine," said one of the artists. "He won't draw newspaper pictures forever. He's as ambitious as they make 'em, and he's a crackerjack of a man for that symbol business."

All the other artists assented to this, and when Borowski, who had been at home with a cold, came to the office next day the agnostic gave him the Resurrection allegory by the Hindoo, and told him to read it through and do his prettiest in the way of illustrating it.

Now, Borowski was a Polish Hebrew, who had come to this country with his parents when he was four years old. But he had a knowledge of English literature that is vouchsafed to few Americans of nineteen, and he had that wonderful temperament that is found so often among the Polish Hebrews. He was an artist to his finger tips. He had steeped

himself in the best examples of art to be found in this country, having gained admittance to many private galleries through the good offices of a millionaire compatriot, and added to that he had condensed into twelve months' study the work of a three years' course in art instruction, and, as the boys said, he was not long for a newspaper office.

He read the allegory that noon and his sympathetic soul recognized a kindred spirit in the work of the Hindoo, and by afternoon he was hard at work on the illustration, having obtained permission to do the work at home, where he would be free from all distracting influences.

He felt he had lived a lifetime when his fellow-artists saw his work. They were generous in their praise. There was no jealous feeling at all. These Americans were honestly proud of their Hebrew brother, and the praise of one's fellow-craftsmen outweighs a whole theaterful of others.

And now comes the conclusion of the whole matter. The story was unsigned, the picture had nothing but initials, and the great public did not know that the editor was an agnostic; but the day after the publication of this agnostic-Hindoo-Hebrew story of the Resurrection admiring letters began to come in from the Christian public, and more than one confessed that the beautiful allegory and the spiritual picture had been in the nature of an uplift.

But let this letter tell its story:

"To the Editor of ———:

"Dear Sir—I am not much on doctrines or forms, but I recognize Christianity and brotherly love when I see them, and I want to tell you how much good that allegory and its accompanying picture did me. No man who was not could have done either story or picture, and I wish you had printed the names of the author and artist. That page represented real Christianity, and I want to thank you for it. ONE WHO HAD DOUBTED."

"They do His will," said the thoughtful man who had known.

A plutocrat, an aristocrat, a scientist, and a pugilist found themselves traveling together. They were all of a size, each one was inclined to be arrogant, and while they were outwardly polite to each other there was not a man among them who did not look down upon the other three.

And a proletariat walked afar off, beneath the contempt of any one of them.

In the course of their journeyings the four entered into a great building devoted to trade and full of men of business, who as soon as they saw the plutocrat began bowing to him and asked him to come and take the highest seat. "For," said they, "you began with one cent and now you have a thousand millions."

The aristocrat sniffed, the scientist sneered, and the pugilist snorted, but there was no doubt of it that if every dog has his day the plutocrat was now having his.

But the proletariat walked afar off, beneath the contempt of any one of them.

After a season they left the hall of the men of trade and traveled to an antique Colonial mansion, which they entered. And here the aristocrat took precedence, and, while the other three were treated with civility, it was he to whom the honors were paid. "For," said one, "his line runs back for many generations, traced in the bluest blood."

And the plutocrat said: "Why, I can buy him out."

And they bowed the plutocrat out.

The pugilist jeered audibly at the family pretensions, and he also was asked to go outside.

The scientist sneered to himself, but he was suffered to remain, for an ancestor of the aristocrat had been a patron of a scientist of the fifteenth century, and there was a tradition in the family that it was quite the proper thing to condescend to science.

Now, the scientist was plainly bored at the rigid etiquette and ceremony of the place, and after a time he rejoined his companions, who were waiting outside, and in a little while the aristocrat came out also, being of a restless temperament and loving travel.

But the proletariat walked afar off, beneath the contempt of any one of them.

It so happened that in their travels they came to a university and all four entered it.

And now it was the scientist who was honored and was invited to a chair, the chair of learning. Whereat the pugilist openly scoffed.

And he went out—with undergraduate help.

For in those days pugilism had not been recognized as one of the fine arts.

And the plutocrat said: "What's the matter with my giving a million dollars to this institution? I guess my name will then last as long as that of the scientist."

But he was not a good guesser.

The aristocrat said: "I understand the reason for these honors to our good friend the scientist. What a pity the fellow has not blood as well as brains."

And the proletariat walked afar off, beneath the

notice of any one of them.

After a time they took up their travels again and came to a great stadium where games and trials of strength were in progress. And it was free to all in honor of the birthday of the ruler of that country. Yes, even the proletariat was there!

The pugilist had begun to swagger as soon as he had come in sight of the stadium, and when the multitude saw him they let forth great cheers, and said, "Make way for the only champion!" And he took a seat of honor, glad that his three companions had lived to see this day.

But the scientist drew back in disgust and marveled that the world should worship brawn.

As for the plutocrat, he said, "I could give every man in this crowd a thousand dollars and never notice it."

But he didn't do it.

The aristocrat was once more in his element, and he proceeded to patronize the pugilist and took him off to introduce him to some of his titled friends. For it is known that for ages the Bluebloods have patronized sport.

On a sudden a great outcry arose in the stadium. Smoke was seen, and cries of fire were heard, and men rushed hither and thither, and the crowd swayed backward and forward, seized with a panic that each moment grew more wild. And in the thick of the crush was the proletariat, who was as poor as the pugilist and as destitute of muscle as the scientist and as weak of intellect as the aristocrat.

But being a brave man he stood his ground undaunted and called upon the crowd to stop its mad rushing, and his voice was charged with magnetism, so that the crowd obeyed him and a great disaster was averted. But he himself was crushed to death.

That night the other four were summoned hence also, and it came to pass that all five stood before the Gate of St. Peter, who asked each one in turn to give an account of himself.

Said the pugilist, "I've knocked out more men than any prize fighter who ever lived."

"Stand aside," said St. Peter, sternly, looking toward the nethermost regions.

"I," said the scientist, "gave my whole life to the propagation of the theory that an apple cannot rise from the grass to a tree on account of the law of gravitation."

"How did that benefit humanity?" asked St. Peter. "I was not thinking of humanity," said the scientist.

The aristocrat advanced with beribboned cap in hand and bowing, said:

"There is no doubt that I will be admitted. I am Percival Blueblood, patron of learning and the fancy and a gentleman! Please direct me to the bath."

"Stand aside," said St. Peter.

Then the plutocrat advanced and said:

"I am the richest man in the world and I want an extra commodious suite. I have done a great deal of good with my money since I turned fifty."

"How many people blessed you for the way you made your money in the first place?" asked St. Peter.

"Well, to tell the exact truth—as a man ought to do at such a time as this—I was cursed not a little in my early years, but I gave a hundred thou—"

"Stand aside," said St. Peter.

Last of all came the proletariat, who said:

"What are the qualifications, St. Peter?"

And St. Peter said:

"How far can you trace your ancestry back?"

"I do not know of a certainty who my father was."

"Umph!" said St. Peter. "How much wisdom have you absorbed?"

"I never went to school."

"Worse and worse," said St. Peter. "How many men have you knocked out in the arena or in business?"

"I am afraid I never knocked any one out. I tried to keep within my rights and meddled with no one. I lacked initiative, I am afraid."

"Umph!" said St. Peter. "Well, how much money have you given to the poor?"

"I had none to give. I tried to make it up by—"

St. Peter interrupted him: "How about that time you quelled the panic at the stadium?"

"Oh, that wasn't anything! Any one would have done that."

"How is that?" said St. Peter, addressing the four who had been told to stand aside.

"He was worth a hundred men that day," said the plutocrat, unable to express himself save in terms of comparative values.

"He showed a self-sacrifice worthy of a scientist," said the man of learning.

"He acted like a thoroughbred," said the aristocrat.

"He was a man all right," said the pugilist, holding out his hand to the pauper.

"Come in," said St. Peter to the proletariat, who left his companions and entered in.

"We might as well continue our journey together," said the aristocrat, with a shrug of his shoulders.