

THEODORE DREISER

*The Village Feudists*

IN A CERTAIN Connecticut fishing-town sometime since, where, besides lobstering, a shipyard and some sail-boat-building there existed the several shops and stores which catered to the wants of those who labored in those lines, there dwelt a groceryman by the name of Elihu Burridge, whose life and methods strongly point the moral and social successes and failures of the rural man.

Sixty years of age, with the vanities and desires of the average man's life behind rather than before him, he was at the time not unlike the conventional drawings of Parson Thirdly, which graced the humorous papers of that day. Two moon-shaped eyes, a long upper lip, a mouth like the sickle moon turned downward, prominent ears, a rather long face and a mutton-chop-shaped whisker on either cheek, served to give him that clerical appearance which the humorous artists so religiously seek to depict. Add to this that he was middle-sized, clerically spare in form, reserved and quiet in demeanor, and one can see how he might very readily give the impression of being a minister. His clothes, however, were old, his trousers torn but neatly mended, his little blue gingham jumper which he wore about the store greasy and aged. Everything about him and his store was so still and dark that one might have been inclined on first sight to consider him crusty and morose.

Even more remarkable than himself, however, was his store. I have seen many in my time that were striking because of their neatness; I never saw one before that struck me as more remarkable for its disorder. In the first place it was filled neck-deep with barrels and boxes in the utmost confusion. Dark, greasy, provision-lined alleys led off into dingy sections which the eye could not penetrate. Old signs hung about, advertising things which had long since ceased to sell and were forgotten by the public. There were pictures in once gilt but now time-blackened frames, wherein queerly depicted children and pompous-looking grocers offered one commodity and another, all now almost obliterated by fly-specks. Shelves were marked on the walls by

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signs now nearly illegible. Cobwebs hung thickly from corners and pillars. There were oil, lard, and a dust-laden scum of some sort on three of the numerous scales with which he occasionally weighed things and on many exteriors of once salable articles. Pork, lard, molasses, and nails were packed in different corners of the place in barrels. Lying about were household utensils, ship-rigging, furniture and a hundred other things which had nothing to do with the grocery business.

As I entered the store the first afternoon I noticed a Bible open at Judges and a number of slips of paper on which questions had been written. On my second visit for oil and vinegar, two strangers from off a vagrant yacht which had entered the little harbor nudged one another and demanded to know whether either had ever seen anything like it. On the third, my companion protested that it was not clean, and seeing that there were other stores we decided to buy our things elsewhere. This was not so easily accomplished.

"Where can I get a flatiron?" I inquired at the Postoffice when I first entered the village.

"Most likely at Burridge's," was the reply.

"Do you know where I can get a pair of row-locks?" I asked of a boy who was lounging about the town dock.

"At Burridge's," he replied.

When we wanted oars, pickles of a certain variety, golden syrup, and a dozen other things which were essential at times, we were compelled to go to Burridge's, so that at last he obtained a very fair portion of our trade despite the condition of his store.

During all these earlier dealings there cropped up something curt and dry in his conversation. One day we lost a fruit jar which he had loaned, and I took one very much like it back in its place. When I began to apologize he interrupted me with, "A jar's a jar, isn't it?"

Another time, when I remarked in a conciliatory tone that he owed me eight cents for a can of potted ham which had proved stale, he exclaimed, "Well, I won't owe you long," and forthwith pulled the money out of the loose jacket of his jumper and paid me.

I inquired one day if a certain thing were good. "If it isn't,"

he replied, with a peculiar elevation of the eyebrows, "your money is. You can have that back."

"That's the way you do business, is it?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, and his long upper lip thinned out along the line of the lower one like a vise.

I was in search of a rocking-chair one day and was directed to Burridge's as the only place likely to have any!

"Do you keep furniture?" I inquired.

"Some," he said.

"Have you a rocking-chair?"

"No, sir."

A day or two later I was in search of a table and on going to Burridge's found that he had gone to a neighboring city.

"Have you got a table?" I inquired of the clerk.

"I don't know," he replied. "There's some furniture in the back room, but I don't know as I dare to sell any of it while he's away."

"Why?"

"Well, he don't like me to sell any of it. He's kind of queer that way. I dunno what he intends to do with it. Gar!" he added in a strangely electric way, "he's a queer man! He's got a lot of things back there—chairs and tables and everything. He's got a lot more in a loft up the street here. He never seems to want to sell any of 'em. Heard him tell people he didn't have any."

I shook my head in puzzled desperation.

"Come on, let's go back and look anyway. There's no harm in seeing if he has one."

We went back and there amid pork and molasses barrels, old papers, boxes and signs, was furniture in considerable quantity—tables, rocking-chairs, washstands, bureaus—all cornered and tumbled about.

"Why, here are rocking-chairs, lots of them," I exclaimed. "Just the kind I want! He said he didn't have any."

"Gar! I dunno," replied the clerk. "Here's a table, but I wouldn't dare sell it to you."

"Why should he say he didn't have a rocking-chair?"

"Gar! I dunno. He's goin' out of the furniture business. He don't want to sell any. I don't know what he intends to do with it."

"Well," I said in despair, "what about the table? You can sell that, can't you?"

"I couldn't—not till he comes back. I don't know what he'd want to do about it."

"What's the price of it?"

"I dunno. He could tell you."

I went out of the thick-aired stuffy backroom with its unwashed windows, and when I got opposite the Bible near the door I said:

"What's the matter with him anyhow? Why doesn't he straighten things out here?"

Again the clerk awoke. "Huh!" he exclaimed. "Straighten it out! Gar! I'd like to see anybody try it."

"It could be," I said encouragingly.

"Gar!" he chuckled. "One man did try to straighten it out once when Mr. Burridge was away. Got about a third of it cleaned up when he come back. Gar! You oughta seen him! Gar!"

"What did he do?"

"What did he do! What didn't he do! Gar! Just took things an' threw them about again. Said he couldn't find anything."

"You don't say!"

"Gar! I should say so! Man come in an' asked for a hammer. Said he couldn't find any hammer, things was so mixed up. Did it with screws, water-buckets an' everything just the same. Took 'em right off the shelves, where they was all in groups, an' scattered 'em all over the room. Gar! 'Now I guess I can find something when I want it,' he said." The clerk paused to squint and add, "There ain't anybody tried any straightenin' out around here since then, you bet. Gar!"

"How long ago has that been?"

"About fourteen years now."

Surprised by this sharp variation from the ordinary standards of trade, I began thinking of possible conditions which had produced it, when one evening I happened in on the local barber. He was a lean, inquisitive individual with a shock of sandy hair and a conspicuous desire to appear a well-rounded social factor.

"What sort of person is this Burridge over here? He keeps such a peculiar store."

"Elihu is a bit peculiar," he replied, his smile betraying a desire to appear conservative. "The fault with Elihu, if he has one, is that he's terribly strong on religion. Can't seem to agree with anybody around here."

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"It's more'n I could ever make out, what is the matter with him. They're all a little bit cracked on the subject around here. Nothing but revivals and meetin's, year in and year out. They're stronger on it winters than they are in summer."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, they'll be more against yachtin' and Sunday pleasures when they can't go than when they can."

"What about Elihu?" I asked.

"Well, he can't seem to get along, somehow. He used to belong to the Baptist Church, but he got out o' that. Then he went to a church up in Graylock, but he had a fallin' out up there. Then he went to Northfield and Eustis. He's been all around, even over on Long Island. He goes to church up at Amherst now, I believe."

"What seems to be the trouble?"

"Oh, he's just strong-headed, I guess." He paused, and ideas lagged until finally I observed:

"It's a very interesting store he keeps."

"It's just as Billy Drumgold told him once: 'Burrige,' he says, 'you've got everything in this store that belongs to a full-rigged ship 'cept one thing.' 'What's that?' Burrige asks. 'A second-hand pulpit.' 'Got that too,' he answered, and takes him upstairs, and there he had one sure enough."

"Well," I said, "what was he doing with it?"

"Danged if I know. He had it all right. Has it yet, so they say."

Days passed and as the summer waned the evidences of a peculiar life accumulated. Noank, apparently, was at outs with Burrige on the subject of religion, and he with it. There were instances of genuine hard feeling against him.

Writing a letter in the Postoffice one day I ventured to take up this matter with the postmaster.

"You know Mr. Burrige, don't you—the grocer?"

"Well, I should guess I did," he replied with a flare.

"Anything wrong with him?"

“Oh, about everything that’s just plain cussed—the most wrangling man alive. I never saw such a man. He don’t get his mail here no more because he’s mad at me, I guess. Took it away because I had Mr. Palmer’s help in my fight, I suppose. Wrote me that I should send all his mail up to Mystic, and he goes there three or four miles out of his way every day, just to spite me. It’s against the law. I hadn’t ought to be doing it, re-addressing his envelopes three or four times a day, but I do do it. He’s a strong-headed man, that’s the trouble with Elihu.”

I had no time to follow this up then, but a little later, sitting in the shop of the principal sailboat maker, which was situated in the quiet little lane which follows the line of the village, I was one day surprised by the sudden warm feeling which the name of Elihu generated. Something had brought up the subject of religion, and I said that Burridge seemed rather religious.

“Yes,” said the sailboat maker quickly, “he’s religious, all right, only he reads the Bible for others, not for himself.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Why, he wants to run things, that’s what. As long as you agree with Elihu, why, everything’s all right. When you don’t, the Bible’s against you. That’s the way he is.”

“Did he ever disagree with you?” I asked, suspecting some personal animus in the matter.

“Me and Elihu was always good friends as long as I agreed with him,” he went on bitterly. “We’ve been raised together, man and boy, for pretty near sixty years. We never had a word of any kind but what was friendly, as long as I agreed with him, but just as soon as I didn’t he took a set against me, and we ain’t never spoke a word since.”

“What was the trouble?” I inquired sweetly, anxious to come at the kernel of this queer situation.

“Well,” he said, dropping his work and looking up to impress me, “I’m a man that’ll sometimes say what I don’t believe; that is, I’ll agree with what I hadn’t ought to, just to be friendly like. I did that way a lot o’ times with Elihu till one day he came to me with something about particular salvation. I’m a little more liberal myself. I believe in universal redemption by faith alone. Well, Elihu came to me and began telling

me what he believed. Finally he asked me something about particular salvation and wanted to know whether I didn't agree with him. I didn't, and told him so. From that day on he took a set against me, and he ain't never spoke a word to me since."

I was unaware that there was anything besides a religious disagreement in this local situation until one day I happened to come into a second friendly contact with the postmaster. We were speaking of the characteristics of certain individuals, and I mentioned Burrige.

"He's all right when you take him the way he wants to be taken. When you don't you'll find him quite a different man."

"He seems to be straightforward and honest," I said.

"There ain't anything you can tell me about Elihu Burrige that I don't know," he replied feelingly. "Not a thing. I've lived with him, as you might say, all my life. Been raised right here in town with him, and we went to school together. Man and boy, there ain't ever been a thing that Elihu has agreed with, without he could have the running of it. You can't tell me anything about him that I don't know."

I could not help smiling at the warmth of feeling, although something about the man's manner bespoke a touch of heartache, as if he were privately grieving.

"What was the trouble between you two?" I asked.

"It's more'n I could ever find out," he replied in a voice that was really mournful, so difficult and non-understandable was the subject to him. "Before I started to work for this office there wasn't a day that I didn't meet and speak friendly with Elihu. He used to have a good many deeds and papers to sign, and he never failed to call me in when I was passing. When I started to work for this office I noticed he took on a cold manner toward me, and I tried to think of something I might have done, but I couldn't. Finally I wrote and asked him if there was anything between us if he wouldn't set a time and place so's we might talk it over and come to an understanding." He paused and then added, "I wish you could see the letter he wrote me. Comin' from a Christian man—from him to me—I wish you could see it."

"Why don't you show it to me?" I asked inquisitively.

He went back into the office and returned with an ancient-

looking document, four years old it proved to be, which he had been treasuring. He handed me the thumbed and already yellowed page, and I read:

“MATTHEW HOLCOMB, ESQUIRE,

“DEAR SIR:—In reply to your letter asking me to set a time and place in which we might talk over the trouble between us, would say that the time be Eternity and the place where God shall call us to judgment.

“Very truly,

“ELIHU BURRIDGE.”

His eyes rested on me while I read, and the moment I finished he began with:

“I never said one word against that man, not one word. I never did a thing he could take offense at, not one thing. I don’t know how a man can justify himself writing like that.”

“Perhaps it’s political,” I said. “You don’t belong to the same party, do you?”

“Yes, we do,” he said. “Sometimes I’ve thought that maybe it was because I had the support of the shipyard when I first tried to get this office, but then that wasn’t anything between him and me,” and he looked away as if the mystery were inexplicable.

This shipyard was conducted by a most forceful man but one as narrow and religionistic as this region in which it had had its rise. Old Mr. Palmer, the aged founder of it, had long been a notable figure in the streets and private chambers of the village. The principal grocery store, coal-yard, sail-loft, hotel and other institutions were conducted in its interests. His opinion was always foremost in the decision of the local authorities. He was still, reticent, unobtrusive. Once I saw him most considerately helping a cripple up the lane to the local Baptist Church.

“What’s the trouble between Burridge and Palmer?” I asked of the sail-maker finally, coming to think that here, if anywhere, lay the solution of the difficulty.

“Two big fish in too small a basket,” he responded laconically.

“Can’t agree, eh?”

“They both want to lead, or did,” he said. “Elihu’s a beaten

man, though, now." He paused and then added, "I'm sorry for Elihu. He's a good man at heart, one of the kindest men you ever saw, when you let him follow his natural way. He's good to the poor, and he's carried more slow-pay people than any man in this country, I do believe. He won't collect an old debt by law. Don't believe in it. No, sir. Just a kind-hearted man, but he loves to rule."

"How about Palmer?" I inquired.

"Just the same way exactly. He loves to rule, too. Got a good heart, too, but he's got a lot more money than Elihu and so people pay more attention to him, that's all. When Elihu was getting the attention he was just the finest man you ever saw, kind, generous, good-natured. People love to be petted, at least some people do—you know they do. When you don't pet 'em they get kind o' sour and crabbed like. Now that's all that's the matter with Elihu, every bit of it. He's sour, now, and a little lonely, I expect. He's drove away every one from him, or nearly all, 'cept his wife and some of his kin. Anybody can do a good grocery business here, with the strangers off the boats"—the harbor was a lively one—"all you have to do is carry a good stock. That's why he gets along so well. But he's drove nearly all the local folks away from him."

I listened to this comfortable sail-loft sage, and going back to the grocery store one afternoon took another look at the long, grim-faced silent figure. He was sitting in the shadow of one of his moldy corners, and if there had ever been any light of merriment in his face it was not there now. He looked as fixed and solemn as an ancient puritan, and yet there was something so melancholy in the man's eye, so sad and disappointed, that it seemed anything but hard. Two or three little children were playing about the door and when he came forward to wait on me one of them sidled forward and put her chubby hand in his.

"Your children?" I asked, by way of reaching some friendly understanding.

"No," he replied, looking fondly down, "she belongs to a French lady up the street here. She often comes down to see me, don't you?" and he reached over and took the fat little cheek between his thumb and forefinger.

The little one rubbed her face against his worn baggy trousers' leg and put her arm about his knee. Quietly he stood there in a simple way until she loosened her hold upon him, when he went about his labor.

I was sitting one day in the loft of the comfortable sail-maker, who, by the way, was brother-in-law to Burr ridge, when I said to him:

"I wish you'd tell me the details about Elihu. How did he come to be what he is? You ought to know; you've lived here all your life."

"So I do know," he replied genially. "What do you want me to tell you?"

"The whole story of the trouble between him and Palmer; how he comes to be at outs with all these people."

"Well," he began, and here followed with many interruptions and side elucidations, which for want of space have been eliminated, the following details:

Twenty-five years before Elihu had been the leading citizen of Noank. From operating a small grocery at the close of the Civil War he branched out until he sold everything from ship-rigging to hardware. Noank was then in the height of its career as a fishing town and as a port from which expeditions of all sorts were wont to sail. Whaling was still in force, and vessels for whaling expeditions were equipped here. Wealthy sea-captains frequently loaded fine three-masted schooners here for various trading expeditions to all parts of the world; the fishers for mackerel, cod and herring were making three hundred and fifty dollars a day in season, and thousands of dollars' worth of supplies were annually purchased here.

Burr ridge was then the only tradesman of any importance and, being of a liberal, strong-minded and yet religious turn, attracted the majority of this business to him. He had houses and lands, was a deacon in the local Baptist Church and a counselor in matters political, social and religious, whose advice was seldom rejected. Every Fourth of July during these years it was his custom to collect all the children of the town in front of his store and treat them to ice-cream. Every Christmas Eve he traveled about the streets in a wagon, which carried half a dozen barrels of candy and nuts, which he would ladle out to the merry shouting throng of pursuing

youngsters, until all were satisfied. For the skating season he prepared a pond, spending several thousand dollars damming up a small stream, in order that the children might have a place to skate. He created a library where all might obtain suitable reading, particularly the young.

On New Year's morning it was his custom to visit all the poor and bereaved and lonely in Noank, taking a great dray full of presents and leaving a little something with his greetings and a pleasant handshake at every door. The lonely rich as well as the lonely poor were included, for he was certain, as he frequently declared, that the rich could be lonely too.

He once told his brother-in-law that one New Year's Day a voice called to him in church: "Elihu Burridge, how about the lonely rich and poor of Noank?" "Up I got," he concluded, "and from that day to this I have never neglected them."

When any one died who had a little estate to be looked after for the benefit of widows or orphans, Burridge was the one to take charge of it. People on their deathbeds sent for him, and he always responded, taking energetic charge of everything and refusing to take a penny for his services. After a number of years the old judge to whom he always repaired with these matters of probate, knowing his generosity in this respect, also refused to accept any fee. When he saw him coming he would exclaim:

"Well, Elihu, what is it this time? Another widow or orphan that we've got to look after?"

After Elihu had explained what it was, he would add:

"Well, Elihu, I do hope that some day some rich man will call you to straighten out his affairs. I'd like to see *you* get a little something, so that *I* might get a little something. Eh, Elihu?" Then he would jocularly poke his companion in charity in the ribs.

These general benefactions were continuous and coeval with his local prosperity and dominance, and their modification as well as the man's general decline the result of the rise of this other individual—Robert Palmer,—“operating” to take the color of power and preëminence from him.

Palmer was the owner of a small shipyard here at the time, a thing which was not much at first but which grew swiftly.

He was born in Noank also, a few years before Burridge, and as a builder of vessels had been slowly forging his way to a moderate competence when Elihu was already successful. He was a keen, fine-featured, energetic individual, with excellent commercial and strong religious instincts, and by dint of hard labor and a saving disposition he obtained, soon after the Civil War, a powerful foothold. Many vessels were ordered here from other cities. Eventually he began to build barges in large numbers for a great railroad company.

Early becoming a larger employer of labor than any one else in the vicinity he soon began to branch out, possessed himself of the allied industries of ship-rigging, chandlery, and finally established a grocery store for his employees, and opened a hotel. Now the local citizens began to look upon him as their leading citizen. They were always talking of his rise, frequently in the presence of Burridge. He said nothing at first, pretending to believe that his quondam leadership was unimpaired. Again, there were those who, having followed the various branches of labor which Palmer eventually consolidated, viewed this growth with sullen and angry eyes. They still sided with Burridge, or pretended still to believe that he was the more important citizen of the two. In the course of time, however—a period of thirty years or more—some of them failed; others died; still others were driven away for want of a livelihood. Only Burridge's position and business remained, but in a sadly weakened state. He was no longer a man of any great importance.

Not unnaturally, this question of local supremacy was first tested in the one place in which local supremacy is usually tested—the church where they both worshiped. Although only one of five trustees, Burridge had been the will of the body. Always, whatever he thought, the others had almost immediately agreed to it. But now that Palmer had become a power, many of those ardent in the church and beholden to him for profit became his humble followers. They elected him trustee and did what he wished, or what they thought he wished. To Burridge this made them sycophants, slaves.

Now followed the kind of trivialities by which most human feuds are furthered. The first test of strength came when a vagrant evangelist from Alabama arrived and desired to use

the church for a series of evening lectures. The question had to be decided at once. Palmer was absent at the time.

"Here is a request for the use of the church," said one of the trustees, explaining its nature.

"Well," said Burrige, "you'd better let him have it."

"Do you think we ought to do anything about it," the trustee replied, "until Mr. Palmer returns?"

Although Burrige saw no reason for waiting, the other trustees did, and upon that the board rested. Burrige was furious. By one fell stroke he was put in second place, a man who had to await the return of Palmer—and that in his own church, so to speak.

"Why," he told some one, "the rest of us are nothing. This man is a king."

From that time on differences of opinion within the church and elsewhere were common. Although no personal animosity was ever admitted, local issues almost invariably found these two men opposed to each other. There was the question of whether the village should be made into a borough—a most trivial matter; another, that of creating public works for the manufacture of gas and distribution of water; a third, that of naming a State representative. Naturally, while these things might be to the advantage of Palmer or not, they were of no great import to Burrige, but yet he managed to see in them an attempt or attempts to saddle a large public debt upon widows and orphans, those who could not afford or did not need these things, and he proceeded to so express himself at various public meetings. Slowly the breach widened. Burrige became little more than a malcontent in many people's eyes. He was a "knocker," a man who wanted to hold the community back.

Although defeated in many instances he won in others, and this did not help matters any. At this point, among other things the decay of the fishing industry helped to fix definitely the position of the two men as that of victor and vanquished. Whaling died out, then mackerel and cod were caught only at farther and farther distances from the town, and finally three- and even two-masted schooners ceased entirely to buy their outfits here, and Burrige was left dependent upon local patronage or smaller harbor trade for his support. Coexten-

sively, he had the dissatisfaction of seeing Palmer's industries grow until eventually three hundred and fifty men were upon his payrolls and even his foremen and superintendents were considered influential townspeople. Palmer's son and two daughters grew up and married, branched out and became owners of industries which had formerly belonged to men who had traded with Burridge. He saw his grocery trade dwindle and sink, while with age his religiosity grew, and he began to be little more than a petty disputant, one constantly arguing as to whether the interpretation of the Bible as handed down from the pulpit of what he now considered *his* recalcitrant church was sound or not. When those who years before had followed him obediently now pricked him with theological pins and ventured to disagree with him, he was quick and sometimes foolish in his replies. Thus, once a former friend and fellow-church-member who had gone over to the opposition came into his store one morning and said:

"Elihu, for a man that's as strong on religion as you are, I see you do one thing that can't quite be justified by the Book."

"What's that?" inquired Burridge, looking up.

"I see you sell tobacco."

"I see you chew it," returned the host grimly.

"I know I do," returned his visitor, "but I'll tell you what I'll do, Elihu. If you'll quit selling, I'll quit chewing it," and he looked as if he had set a fancy trap for his straw-balancing brother, as he held him to be.

"It's a bargain," said Burridge on the instant. "It's a bargain!"

And from that day on tobacco was not offered for sale in that store, although there was a large local demand for it.

Again, in the pride of his original leadership, he had accepted the conduct of the local cemetery, a thing which was more a burden than a source of profit. With his customary liberality in all things reflecting credit upon himself he had spent his own money in improving it, much more than ever the wardens of the church would have thought of returning to him. In one instance, when a new receiving vault was desired, he had added seven hundred dollars of his own to three hundred gathered by the church trustees for the purpose, and

the vault was immediately constructed. Frequently also, in his pride of place, he had been given to asserting he was tired of conducting the cemetery and wished he could resign.

In these later evil days, therefore, the trustees, following the star of the newer power, saw fit to intimate that perhaps some one else would be glad to look after it if he was tired of it. Instantly the fact that he could no longer boast as formerly came home to him. He was not essential any longer in anything. The church did not want him to have a hand in any of its affairs! The thought of this so weighed on him that eventually he resigned from this particular task, but thereafter also every man who had concurred in accepting his resignation was his bitter enemy. He spoke acidly of the seven hundred he had spent, and jibed at the decisions of the trustees in other matters. Soon he became a disturbing element in the church, taking a solemn vow never to enter the graveyard again, and not long after resigned all his other official duties—passing the plate, et cetera—although he still attended services there.

Decoration Day rolled around, the G. A. R. Post of which he was an ardent member prepared for the annual memorial services over the graves of its dead comrades. Early on the morning of the thirtieth of May they gathered before their lodge hall, Burrige among them, and after arranging the details marched conspicuously to the cemetery where the placing of the wreaths and the firing of the salute were to take place. No one thought of Burrige until the gate was reached, when, gun over shoulder and uniform in perfect trim, he fell conspicuously out of line and marched away home alone. It was the cemetery he had vowed not to enter, his old pet and protégé.

Men now looked askance at him. He was becoming queer, no doubt of it, not really sensible—or was he? Up in Northfield, a nearby town, dwelt a colonel of the Civil War who had led the very regiment of which Burrige was a member but who during the war had come into serious difficulty through a tangle of orders, and had been dishonorably discharged. Although wounded in one of the engagements in which the regiment had distinguished itself, he had been allowed to languish almost forgotten for years and finally,

failing to get a pension, had died in poverty. On his deathbed he had sent for Burrige, and reminding him of the battle in which he had led him asked that after he was gone, for the sake of his family, he would take up the matter of a pension and if possible have his record purged of the stigma and the pension awarded.

Burrige agreed most enthusiastically. Going to the local congressman, he at once began a campaign, but because of the feeling against him two years passed without anything being done. Later he took up the matter in his own *G. A. R. Post*, but there also failing to find the measure of his own enthusiasm, he went finally direct to one of the senators of the State and laying the matter before him had the records examined by Congress and the dead colonel honorably discharged.

One day thereafter in the local *G. A. R.* he commented unfavorably upon the indifference which he deemed had been shown.

"There wouldn't have been half so much delay if the man hadn't been a deserter," said one of his enemies—one who was a foreman in Palmer's shipyard.

Instantly Burrige was upon his feet, his eyes aflame with feeling. Always an orator, with a strangely declamatory style he launched into a detailed account of the late colonel's life and services, his wounds, his long sufferings and final death in poverty, winding up with a vivid word picture of a battle (*Antietam*), in which the colonel had gallantly captured a rebel flag and come by his injury.

When he was through there was great excitement in the *Post* and much feeling in his favor, but he rather weakened the effect by at once demanding that the traitorous words be withdrawn, and failing to compel this, preferred charges against the man who had uttered them and attempted to have him court-martialed.

So great was the bitterness engendered by this that the *Post* was now practically divided, and being unable to compel what he considered justice he finally resigned. Subsequently he took issue with his former fellow-soldiers in various ways, commenting satirically on their church regularity and professed Christianity, as opposed to their indifference to the late

colonel, and denouncing in various public conversations the double-mindedness and sharp dealings of the "little gods," as he termed those who ran the G. A. R. Post, the church, and the shipyards.

Not long after his religious affairs reached a climax when the minister, once a good friend of his, following the lead of the dominant star, Mr. Palmer, publicly denounced him from the pulpit one Sunday as an enemy of the church and of true Christianity!

"There is a man in this congregation," he exclaimed in a burst of impassioned oratory, "who poses as a Christian and a Baptist, who is in his heart's depth the church's worst enemy. Hell and all its devils could have no worse feelings of evil against the faith than he, and he doesn't sell tobacco, either!"

The last reference at once fixed the identity of the person, and caused Burrige to get up and leave the church. He pondered over this for a time, severed his connections with the body, and having visited Graylock one Sunday drove there every Sabbath thereafter, each time going to a different church. After enduring this for six months he generated a longing for a more convenient meeting-place, and finally allied himself with the Baptist Church of Eustis. Here his anchor might possibly have remained fast had it not been that subtle broodings over his wrongs, a calm faith in the righteousness of his own attitude, and disgust with those whom he saw calmly expatiating upon the doctrines and dogmas of religion in his own town finally caused him to suspect a universal misreading of the Bible. This doubt, together with his own desire for justification according to the Word, finally put the idea in his mind to make a study of the Bible himself. He would read it, he said. He would study Hebrew and Greek, and refer all questionable readings of words and passages back to the original tongue in which it had been written.

With this end in view he began a study of these languages, the importance of the subject so growing upon him that he neglected his business. Day after day he labored, putting a Bible and a Concordance upon a pile of soap-boxes near the door of his store and poring over them between customers, the store meantime taking care of itself. He finally mastered

Greek and Hebrew after a fashion, and finding the word "repent" frequently used, and that God had made man in the image of Himself, with a full knowledge of right and wrong, he gravitated toward the belief that therefore his traducers in Noank knew what they were doing, and that before he needed to forgive them—though his love might cover all—they must repent.

He read the Bible from beginning to end with this one feeling subconsciously dominant, and all its loving commands about loving one another, forgiving your brother seventy times seven, loving those that hate you, returning good for evil, selling all that you have and giving it to the poor, were made to wait upon the duty of others to repent. He began to give this interpretation at Eustis, where he was allowed to have a Sunday-school, until the minister came and told him once, "to his face," as the local report ran: "We don't want you here."

Meekly he went forth and, joining a church across the Sound on Long Island, sailed over every Sunday and there advanced the same views until he was personally snubbed by the minister and attacked by the local papers. Leaving there he went to Amherst, always announcing now that he held distinctive views about some things in the Bible and asking the privilege of explaining. In this congregation he was still comfortably at rest when I knew him.

"All sensitiveness," the sail-maker had concluded after his long account. "There ain't anything the matter with Elihu, except that he's piqued and grieved. He wanted to be the big man, and he wasn't."

I was thinking of this and of his tender relationship with children as I had noticed it, and of his service to the late colonel when one day being in the store, I said:

"Do you stand on the Bible completely, Mr. Burridge?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, "I do."

"Believe every word of it to be true?"

"Yes, sir."

"If your brother has offended you, how many times must you forgive him?"

"Seventy times seven."

"Do you forgive your brothers?"

“Yes, sir—if they repent.”

“If they repent?”

“Yes, sir, if they repent. That’s the interpretation. In Matthew you will find, ‘If he repent, forgive him.’”

“But if you don’t forgive them, even before they repent,” I said, “aren’t you harboring enmity?”

“No, sir, I’m not treasuring up enmity. I only refuse to forgive them.”

I looked at the man, a little astonished, but he looked so sincere and earnest that I could not help smiling.

“How do you reconcile that with the command, ‘Love one another?’ You surely can’t love and refuse to forgive them at the same time?”

“I don’t refuse to forgive them,” he repeated. “If John there,” indicating an old man in a sun-tanned coat who happened to be passing through the store at the time, “should do me a wrong—I don’t care what it was, how great or how vile—if he should come to me and say, ‘Burrige, I’m sorry,’” he executed a flashing oratorical move in emphasis, and throwing back his head, exclaimed: “It’s gone! It’s gone! There ain’t any more of it! All gone!”

I stood there quite dumbfounded by his virility, as the air vibrated with his force and feeling. So manifestly was his reading of the Bible colored by the grief of his own heart that it was almost painful to tangle him with it. Goodness and mercy colored all his ideas, except in relation to his one-time followers, those who had formerly been his friends and now left him to himself.

“Do you still visit the poor and the afflicted, as you once did?” I asked him once.

“I’d rather not say anything about that,” he replied sternly.

“But do you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Still make your annual New Year round?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you’ll get your reward for that, whatever you believe.”

“I’ve had my reward,” he said slowly.

“Had it?”

“Yes, sir, had it. Every hand that’s been lifted to receive the little I had to offer has been my reward.”

He smiled, and then said in seemingly the most untimely way:

“I remember once going to a lonely woman here on New Year’s Day and taking her a little something—basket of grapes or fruit of some kind it was. I was stopping a minute—never stay long, you know; just run in and say ‘Happy New Year!’ leave what I have and get out—and so said, ‘Good morning, Aunt Mary!’

“‘Good morning, Elihu,’ says she.

“‘Can’t stay long, Aunt Mary,’ I said. ‘Just want to leave you these. Happy New Year!’

“Well, sir, you know I was just turning around and starting when she caught hold of my sleeve and says:

“‘Elihu Burridge,’ she says, ‘give me that hand!’ and do you know, before I knew what she was about she took it up to her lips and kissed it! Yes, she did—kissed my hand!

“Now,” he said, drawing himself up, with eyes bright with intense feeling, “you know whether I’ve had my reward or not, don’t you?”