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## Holy Smoke in the Parsonage

By GENEVRA COOK

HOBART ELWOOD MERTON was very dignified, very serious, and very much perturbed. The greatest problem he had ever had to face in his whole four years of study at the theological seminary was before him now. In June he would become Reverend Hobart Elwood Merton, and would take up a pastorate in Birchfield, Massachusetts. And he loved Virginia Crosby.

But there was no doubt about it, Virginia, sweet, adorable, merry, would never be a suitable minister's wife. He recalled with a shiver the episode of last Sunday at Plainville. She had driven down to hear him preach, had got a flat and been late, and she had walked right into the church in the middle of the Psalms! And then, just at the end of his really very good prayer, as he lifted his head, she had looked up at him, and smiled!

The next week-end it had been arranged for him to stay over in Plainville to conduct a service Sunday night. He was to occupy the parsonage, since the regular minister was away on his vacation. Virginia was delighted when he told her.

"That's just gorgeous, Barto!" she said, quirking her lips in her very special smile. "I'm going to be down there this week-end, too, with Aunt Jane. I'll meet you at the church!"

Early Sunday morning Hobart Merton approached the white parsonage beyond the church. The door had been left open for him. As he entered the front hall, he was greeted by a confused shrieking and shouting, and there tumbled through the door of the study a heap of wriggling arms and legs. From this miscellaneous group there disentangled himself, with no small difficulty, a solemn-eyed boy of about ten.

"Are you the minister?" he inquired politely.

"Why, yes. I—I'm the—the present minister—"

The rest of the squirming heap had separated itself into two wide-eyed children, a chubby boy of about three who sat unexpectedly down on the hard floor of the hall, a small freckle-faced girl with a finger in her mouth and tears in her eyes, who flung herself sobbing upon the helpless Hobart and began vehemently to cry.

"We haven't had our breakfast, Mr. —Mrs. Holmes," added the older boy expectantly.

"I'm sorry. I'm not Mr. Holmes. I'm Mr. Merton. Mr. Holmes is away on his vacation—"

The older boy was very grave. "You said you were the minister," he began accusingly.

"Perhaps," suggested the now surrounded Hobart, "if you'd tell me who you are—"

"We live in Canada, and Mr. Holmes told our father when he had to go away to Idaho that we could stay here, and our father sent a telegram, and we just came on the train this morning."

There was the sudden sound of a bell. Hobart Merton, the still wailing girl at the tail of his coat, opened the door. There was Virginia! Her violet eyes swept the group. "Good morning," she sang out gayly. "Why didn't you tell me you were starting a nursery?"

Virginia stayed and told stories to her adoring audience while Hobart Merton preached his sermon at church. She, with the dignity of a perfect hostess, served the dinner afterward in the dining room of the parsonage. And when Hobart came in from the evening service, she was singing them to sleep. Hobart looked longingly after her as Aunt Jane bore her away at last across the street.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by a strange odor in the air. It smelled like smoke. He jumped out of bed, seizing a blanket as he ran, and dashed in the direction of the rooms where the children were sleeping.

"Wake up!" he shouted. He wrapped the terrified little boy in the blanket, pushed the older one, protesting loudly, before him, and, dragging the screaming girl by one hand, rushed them through the dense smoke and out into the air.

There was confusion in the street. The one fire engine—pride of Plainville—rumbled slowly up the road. Neighbors partly dressed rushed excitedly up and down the street. And then, wonders of wonders, sweet beyond compare, there was Virginia!

When the fire had been put out, the children safely put to bed at Aunt Jane's across the street, the neighbors had gone home, Hobart Elwood Merton, unconscious of pajamas, sat on the steps of the parsonage holding the hands of Virginia Crosby. What a perfect minister's wife she would be. He was convinced of it now. So competent. So helpful. So dignified.

". . . and you'll go with me to Birchfield in June?"

He was delirious with happiness. So sweetly, so demurely, she murmured. "Yes." How could he have doubted her, thought her too flippant, too frivolous? There was a long silence. By and by he turned in puzzled fashion to his Virginia.

"What do you suppose caused the fire, anyway?" he asked her.

"I know what it was, parson darlin'!" She bent her head and kissed him swiftly on the lips.

"Holy Smoke!" said Virginia.

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### Peculiar Belief About Monstrosities in Erin

It is affirmed that one does not have to go to equatorial Africa to hunt mysterious lake-dwelling monsters—such monstrosities are talked of in Ireland, an Armagh correspondent writes: "I know nothing of Central Africa, but I know Ireland very well, and there I have encountered the belief in monsters, which are usually described as snakes of enomous size, living in the depths of lakes in various remote places of the island. It is a curious belief, because there are, as is well known, no snakes in Ireland. In the wild western parts of the country, from north to south, this belief exists. The dwelling place of the monster is usually some small, dark, mountain lake, lying under overhanging cliffs, and far from human dwellings. One such I can mention by name. It is known as the Hag's lake, and is in a wild spot called the Hag's glen, lying under the crags of Carrantual, in Kerry, on the northern side of that mountain. A youth who lived in the poor hamlet nearest to this spot assured me that the great 'serpent' which lived in that lake was well known to exist. I asked him if he had seen it. He said 'No,' but his grandmother had seen it very early one morning when she was out on the mountain looking for a beast which had strayed. 'We don't go near the lake in the dark,' he added."—Montreal Family Herald.

### Writer Would Go Limit in State Abbreviations

The abbreviation used for Ohio is "O." Apparently Oklahoma and Oregon do not object. But there are six states whose names begin with letters which are not the first letters of the names of any of the other states. These states are: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Pennsylvania and Utah. Why not use D, F, G, L, P and U for the abbreviations in those cases? Also, West Virginia is the only "West" state. So why not simply use "W. V." instead of the usual "W. Va."? The only reason for abbreviations in the first place is the desire to save time and space. Then why not save all the time and space possible, or else use the full name? Why fuss with "Pa." and "Penn." and "Penna." when "P." would fill the bill?—Worcester Telegram.

### Columbus a Corsican?

Canon Castaing in a lecture at Marseilles asserted that Columbus was a Corsican born at Calvi. He has made a long research into the life of the great explorer and maintains that he has found documentary evidence of the Corsican origin of Columbus. According to Canon Castaing, Columbus was the son of a wool carder and lived at Calvi until he was about ten years old. When Pierre Bonaparte visited Haiti, said the speaker, he discovered an inscription in Spanish on a rock, saying: "Cursed be the Corsican who brought us hither." This inscription, Canon Castaing believes, was written by Spanish navigators and referred to Columbus.—Pathfinder Magazine.

### Advance in Palestine

New staple crops are being introduced into Palestine. Among those that are being tried out by the Palestine department of agriculture are nuts, flax and sunflowers, the department also giving much attention to the fertilization of the soil.

This work under the department is largely directed toward benefiting the local Arab fellsheen, or peasant farmer, because the interests of the Jewish settlers are so well cared for by the Zionist organization. Because of the success of the orange show at Jaffa last year, the event was placed on a permanent basis, and a second show held recently was well received by the large crowds it attracted.

### Being Polite to Spirits

In Borneo many trees valued for their timber are regarded as being the dwelling places of good spirits. Superstition, however, comes to the aid of economic necessity and before he incurs the displeasure of the spirits by destroying their home, the native drives a hatchet into the trunk and returns to his family. If in the morning the hatchet has fallen to the ground it is a sign that the spirit willingly has left the tree for a new residence. It is remarkable, observes a writer in the Sydney Bulletin describing the hokus pocus, how consistently the hatchet fails to stay put.


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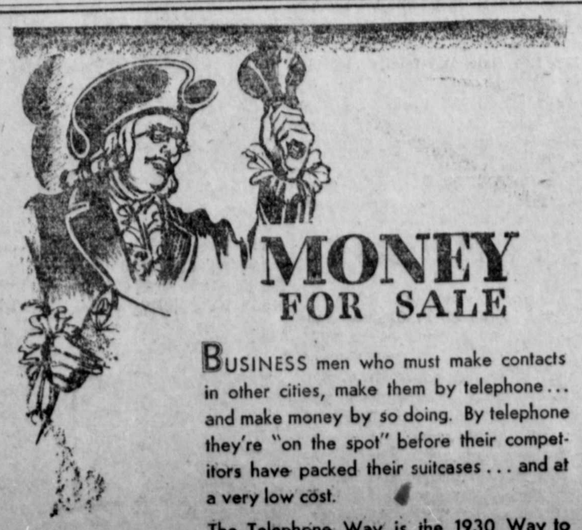
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