

# The Prodigal Village

By Irving Bacheller

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## CHAPTER FOUR.

In Which Mr. Israel Sneed and Other Working Men Receive a Lesson In True Democracy.

Next morning, Mr. Blenkinsop went to cut wood for the Widow Moran. The good woman was amazed by his highly respectable appearance.

"God help us! Ye look like a lawyer," she said.

"I'm a new man! Cut out the blacksmith shop an' the booze an' the bummers."

"May the good God love an' help yet I heard about it."

"Ye did?"

"Sure I did. It's all over the town. Good news has a lively foot, man. The Shepherd clapped his hands when I told him. Ye got to go straight, my laddie buck. All eyes are on ye now. Come up an' see the boy. It's his birthday."

Mr. Blenkinsop was deeply moved by the greeting of the little Shepherd, who kissed his cheek and said that he had often prayed for him.

"If you ever get lonely, come and sit with me and we'll have a talk and a game of dominoes," said the boy.

Mr. Blenkinsop got strength out of the wonderful spirit of Bob Moran and he would have been glad to see him any day.

"I hope your plumbing hasn't gone wrong," he remarked with a smile.

"No, it's worse than that," said Mr. Sneed ruefully.

They had the little Shepherd good night and went downstairs where the widow was still at work with her washing, although it was nine o'clock.

"Faithful woman!" the judge exclaimed as they went out on the street.

"What would the world do without people like that? No extra charge for overtime either."

Then, as they walked along he continually pined for the way for what he knew was coming.

"Did you notice the face of that boy?" he asked.

"Yes, it's a God's blessing to see a face like that," the judge went on. "Only the pure in heart can have it. The old spirit of youth looks out of his eyes—the spirit of my own youth. When I was fourteen, I think that my heart was as pure as his. So were the hearts of most of the boys I know."

"It isn't so now," said Mr. Sneed.

"I fear it isn't," the judge answered.

"There's a new look in the faces of the young. Every variety of evil is spread before them on the stage of our little theater. They see it while their characters are in the making, while their minds are like white wax. Everything that touches them leaves a mark or a smudge. It addresses them in the one language they all understand, and for which no dictionary is needed—pictures. The flower of youth fades fast enough, God knows, without the withering knowledge of evil. They say it's good for the boys and girls to know all about life. We shall see."

Mr. Sneed sat down with Judge Crooker in the handsome library of the

robbers' cave that was on the bill-board of our school of crime a few weeks ago," said the judge. "I'm tired enough to lie down, but I'll go and see Elisha Potts. If he's aboard, he'll have to get up, that's all. There's no telling what Potts has done or may do. Your plumbing is in bad shape, Mr. Sneed. The public sewer is leaking into your cellar and in a case of that kind the less delay the better."

He went into the hall and put on his coat and gloves and took his cane out of the rack. He was sixty-five years of age that winter. It was a bitter night, when even younger men found it a trial to leave the comfort of the fireside. Sneed followed in silence. Indeed, his tongue was shame-bound. For a moment, he knew not what to say.

"I'm much obliged to you," he stammered as they went out into the cold wind. "I—I don't care what it costs, either."

The judge stopped and turned toward him.

"Look here," he said. "Money does not enter into this proceeding or any motive but the will to help a neighbor. In such a matter overtime doesn't count."

They walked in silence to the corner. There Sneed pressed the judge's hand and tried to say something, but his voice failed him.

"Have the boys at my office at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. I want to talk to them," said the kindly old judge as he strode away in the darkness.

## CHAPTER FIVE.

In Which J. Patterson Bing Buys A Necklace of Pearls.

Meanwhile, the Bings had been having a busy winter in New York. J. Patterson Bing had been elected to the board of a large bank in Wall street. His fortune had more than doubled in the last two years and he was now a considerable factor in finance.

Mrs. Bing had been studying current events and French and the English accent and other social graces every morning, with the best tutors, as she reclined comfortably in her bed-chamber while Phyllis went to sundry shops. Mrs. Crooker had once said, "Mamie Bing has a passion for self-improvement." It was mainly if not only true.

Phyllis had been "beating the bush" with her mother at teas and dinners and dances and theaters and country house parties in and about the city. The speedometer on the limousine had doubled its mileage since they came to town. They were, it would seem, a tireless pair of hunters. Phyllis' portrait had appeared in the Sunday papers. It showed a face and form of unusual beauty. The supple grace and classic outlines of the latter were touchingly displayed at the dances in many a handsome ballroom. At last, they had found a promising and most eligible candidate in Roger Delane—a handsome, stalwart youth, a year out of college. His father was a well-known and highly successful merchant of an old family which, for generations, had "belonged"—that is to say, it had been a part of the aristocracy of Fifth avenue.

There could be no doubt of this great good luck of theirs—better, indeed, than Mrs. Bing had dared to hope for—the young man having seriously confided his intentions to J. Patterson. But there was one shadow on the glowing prospect; Phyllis had suddenly taken a bad turn. She moped, as her mother put it. She was listless and unhappy. She had lost her interest in the chase, so to speak. She had little heart for the teas and dances and dinner parties. One day her mother returned from a luncheon and found her weeping. Mrs. Bing went at once to the telephone and called for the stomach specialist. He came and made a brief examination and said that it was all due to rich food and late hours. He left some medicine, advised a day or two of rest in bed, charged a hundred dollars and went away. They tried the remedies, but Phyllis showed no improvement. The young man sent American Beauty roses and a graceful note of regret to her room.

"You ought to be very happy," said her mother. "He is a dear."

"I know it," Phyllis answered. "He's just the most adorable creature I ever saw in my life."

"For goodness' sake! What is the matter with you? Why don't you brace up?" Mrs. Bing asked with a note of impatience in her tone. "You act like a dead fish."

Phyllis, who had been lying on the couch, rose to a sitting posture and flung one of the cushions at her mother.

"How can I brace up?" she asked with indignation in her eyes. "Don't you dare to scold me."

There was a breath of silence in which the two looked into each others' eyes. Many thoughts came flashing into the mind of Mrs. Bing. Why had the girl spoken the word "you" so bitterly? Little echoes of old history began to fill the silence. She arose and picked up the cushion and threw it on the sofa.

"What a temper!" she exclaimed.

"Young lady, you don't seem to know that these days are very precious for you. They will not come again."

Then, in the old fashion of women who have suddenly come out of a moment of affectionate anger, they fell to weeping in each other's arms. The storm was over when they heard the feet of J. Patterson Bing in the hall. Phyllis fled into the bathroom.

"Here!" said Mr. Bing as he entered the door. "I've found out what's the matter with Phyllis. It's nerves. I

met the great specialist, John Hamilton Gibbs, at luncheon today. I described the symptoms. He says it's undoubtedly nerves. He has a number of cases just like this one—rest, fresh air and a careful diet are all that's needed. He says that if he can have her for two weeks he'll guarantee a cure. I've agreed to have you take her to his sanitarium in the Catskills tomorrow. He has saddle horses, sleeping balconies, toboggan slides, snow-shoe and skating parties and all that."

"I think it will be great," said Phyllis, who suddenly emerged from her



There Was a Breath of Silence in Which the Two Looked Into Each Others' Eyes.

hiding-place and embraced her father. "I'd love it! I'm sick of this old town. I'm sure it's just what I need!"

"I couldn't go tomorrow," said Mrs. Bing. "I simply must go to Mrs. Delane's luncheon."

"Then I'll ask Harriet to go up with her," said J. Patterson.

Harriet, who lived in a flat on the upper west side, was Mrs. Bing's sister.

Phyllis went to bed dinnerless with a headache. Mr. and Mrs. Bing sat for a long time over their coffee and cigarettes.

"It's something too dreadful that Phyllis should be getting sick just at the wrong time," said the madame.

"She has always been well. I can't understand it."

"She's had a rather strenuous time here," said J. Patterson.

"But she seemed to enjoy it until—until the right man came along. The very man I hoped would like her! Then, suddenly, she throws up her hands and looks over. It's too devilish for words."

Mr. Bing laughed at his wife's exasperation.

"To me it's no laughing matter," said she with a serious face.

"Perhaps she doesn't like the boy," J. Patterson remarked.

"Mrs. Bing leaned toward him and whispered. "She adores him!" She held her attitude and looked searchingly into her husband's face.

"Well, you can't say I did it," he answered. "The modern girl is a rather delicate piece of machinery. I think she'll be all right in a week or two. Come, it's time we went to the theater if we're going."

Nothing more was said of the matter. Next morning immediately after breakfast, "Aunt Harriet" set out with Phyllis in the big limousine for Doctor Gibbs' sanitarium.

Phyllis found the remedy she needed in the ceaseless round of outdoor frolic. Her spirit washed in the glowing air found refreshment in the sleep that follows weariness and good digestion. Her health improved so visibly that her stay was far prolonged. It was the first week of May when Mrs. Bing drove up to get her. The girl was in perfect condition, it would seem. No rustic maid, in all the mountain valleys, had lighter feet or clearer eyes or a more honest, ruddy tan in her face, due to the touch of the clean wind. She had grown as lithe and strong as a young panther.

They were going back to Bingville next day. Martha and Susan had been getting the house ready. Mrs. Bing had been preparing what she fondly hoped would be "a lovely surprise" for Phyllis. Roger Delane was coming up to spend a quiet week with the Bings—a week of opportunity for the young people, with saddle horses and a new steam launch and a Peterborough canoe and all pleasant accessories. Then, on the twentieth, which was the birthday of Phyllis, there was to be a dinner and a house party and possibly an announcement and a pretty wadding of tongues. Indeed, J. Patterson had already bought the wedding gift, a necklace of pearls, and paid a hundred thousand dollars for it and put it away in his safe. The necklace had pleased him. He had seen many jewels, but nothing so satisfying—nothing that so well expressed his affection for his daughter. He might never see its like again. So he bought it against the happy day which he hoped was near. He had shown it to his wife and charged her to make no mention of it until "the time was ripe," in his way of speaking.

Mrs. Bing had promised on her word and honor to respect the confidence of her husband, with all righteous inten-

tion, but on the very day of their arrival in Bingville, Sophronia (Mrs. Pendleton) Ames called. Sophronia was the oldest and dearest friend that Mamie Bing had in the village. The latter enjoyed her life in New York, but she felt always a thrill at coming back to her big garden and the green trees and the ample spaces of Bingville, and to the ready, sympathetic confidence of Sophronia Ames. She told Sophronia of brilliant scenes in the changing spectacle of metropolitan life, of the wonderful young man and the untimely affliction of Phyllis, now happily past. Then, in a whisper, while Sophronia held up her right hand as a pledge of secrecy, she told of the necklace of which the lucky girl had no knowledge. Now, Mrs. Ames was one of the best of women. People were wont to speak of her, and rightly, as "the salt of the earth." She would do anything possible for a friend. But Mamie Bing had asked too much. Moreover, always it had been understood between them that these half-playful oaths were not to be taken too seriously. Of course, "the fish had to be fed," as Judge Crooker had once put it. By "the fish," he meant that curious under-life of the village—the voracious, silent, merciless, cold-blooded thing which fed on the sins and follies of men and women and which rarely came to the surface to bother anyone.

"The fish are very wise," Judge Crooker used to say. "They know the truth about every one and it's well that they do. After all, they perform an important office. There's many a man and woman who think they're been fooling the fish, but they're only fooling themselves."

And within a day or two, the secrets of the Bing family were swimming up and down the stream of the under-life of Bingville.

Mr. Bing had found a situation in the plant which was new to him. The men were discontented. Their wages were "sky high," to quote a phrase of one of the foremen. Still, they were not satisfied. Reports of the fabulous earnings of the mill had spread among them. They had begun to think that they were not getting a fair division of the proceeds of their labor. At a meeting of the help a radical speaker had declared that one of the Bing women wore a noose of pearls on her neck worth half a million dollars. The men wanted more pay and less work. A committee of their leaders had called at Mr. Bing's office with a demand soon after his arrival. Mr. Bing had said "no" with a bang of his fist on the table. A workers' meeting was to be held a week later to act upon the report of the committee.

Meanwhile, another cause of worry had come or rather returned to him. Again, Phyllis had begun to show symptoms of the old trouble. Mrs. Bing, arriving at dusk from a market trip to Hazelmead with Sophronia Ames, had found Phyllis lying asleep among the cushions on the great couch in the latter's bedroom. She entered the room softly and leaned over the girl and looked into her face, now turned toward the open window and lighted by the falling glow in the western sky and relaxed by sleep. It was a sad face! There were lines and shadows in it which the anxious mother had not seen before and—had she been crying? Very softly, the woman sat down at the girl's side. Darkness fell, black, menacing shadows filled the corners of the room. The spirit of the girl betrayed its trouble in a sorrowful groan as she slept. Roger Delane was coming next day. There was every reason why Phyllis should be happy. Silently, Mrs. Bing left the room. She met Martha in the hall.

"I shall wait no dinner and Mr. Bing is dining in Hazelmead," she whispered. "Miss Phyllis is asleep. Don't disturb her."

Then she sat down in the darkness of her own bedroom alone.

(To be continued.)

**NOTICE OF SALE.**  
The entire stock of goods of the Crowell Variety Store, bankrupt, including the fixtures, is offered for sale by the undersigned trustee.  
Bids will be received not later than 12 o'clock M., August 15th, 1921.  
Will be glad to show any one interested the inventory of stock of goods and fixtures, and will take them to store and let them inspect goods and fixtures. Terms of sale cash.  
W. O. LEMMOND, Trustee.

**NOTICE**  
It is resolved by the Board of Aldermen of the City of Monroe, N. C., that the Sanitary Department of the City remove the trash and rubbish placed in receptacles on the edge of the sidewalks in the mornings of the days for the several wards as follows:  
Ward One, on Mondays of each week.  
Ward Two, on Tuesdays of each week.  
Ward Three, on Wednesdays of each week.  
Ward Four, on Thursdays of each week.  
Ward Five, on Fridays of each week.  
On Saturdays the general business section of the City.  
Please see that all trash around your premises is placed in a receptacle on the days for your ward and do not expect the wagon on other days. If you will co-operate with us we will clean up the City.  
Respectfully,  
W. J. TRULL,  
Chairman Sanitary Committee.

**LAND POSTED.**  
All persons are hereby notified that they will be indicted if they trespass on our lands in Monroe township, Union county, N. C., by hunting with or without dogs, fishing in any manner, cutting or hauling wood or litter, picking berries, grazing stock, or in any manner whatsoever.—J. H. McCollum, J. A. McCollum, J. E. McCollum, M. H. McCollum, J. W. Chaney, H. F. Chaney, Fred A. Chaney, Jay Helms, J. V. Griffin, Mrs. Ella Stewart, H. F. Williams, W. D. Bivens, T. C. Lee, Myers Medlin.

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"I was hardly able to drag, I was so weakened," writes Mrs. W. F. Ray, of Easley, S. C. "The doctor treated me for about two months, still I didn't get any better. I had a large family and felt I surely must do something to enable me to take care of my little ones. I had heard of  
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"I decided to try it," continues Mrs. Ray. "I took eight bottles in all. . . I regained my strength and have had no more trouble with womanly weakness. I have ten children and am able to do all my housework and a lot outdoors. . . I can sure recommend Cardui."  
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At all druggists.



Mr. Sneed Sat Down With Judge Crooker in the Handsome Library of the Latter and Opened His Heart.

latter and opened his heart. His son Richard, a boy of fifteen, and three other lads of the village, had been committing small burglaries and storing their booty in a cave in a piece of woods on the river bank near the village. A constable had secured a confession and recovered a part of the booty. Enough had been found to warrant a charge of grand larceny and Elisha Potts, whose store had been entered, was clamoring for the arrest of the boys.

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