

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow  
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke  
Nestroy Marie de France  
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht  
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz  
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
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Sachs Poe Liebermann Kock Korolenko  
de Sade Praetorius Mistral Zetkin



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# **St. Cuthbert's**

Robert E. Knowles

# Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Robert E. Knowles

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-5292-5

[www.tredition.com](http://www.tredition.com)

[www.tredition.de](http://www.tredition.de)

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*To The Canadian Pilgrim Fathers*

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## ST. CUTHBERT'S

### I

#### *The TURN of The TIDE*

"If you don't get the call you needn't come back here," said my wife to me as I stood upon the door-sill, bag in hand, and my hard-bought ticket in my pocket.

"Well, dear one, I would be sure of it if they could only see the perquisite that goes along with me."

"You must be more serious, Tom, if you expect great calls; but come inside a minute till I say good-bye. When you brought me first to Canada we had half a dozen good-byes to every one farewell. Good-bye again, and if they don't call you they will deserve what they lose."

Thus spoke my wife, and thus was I despatched on the mission that was big with moment.

It was a wondrous hour that brought to us the invitation which I was now proceeding to accept. Not that we were unhappy because our salary was small; we had not lived by bread alone, and our souls [10] were well content. But my wife had delirious visions, which she affirmed were sane and reasonable, of her husband's coming yet into his own, and indulged every now and then in savage and delicious little declarations of the great misfit, which misfit was in my being the minister of a little church which afforded a little salary and provoked a little fame.

Her other days had been spent in luxury and amid the refinement and the pleasures which money only can provide. And when, our wedding day drawing near apace, I sent her my budget letter, bitterly revealing impecunious facts at which I had before but darkly hinted, and warning her of all the sacrifice which lay beyond, she replied with vehement repudiation of any fears, and in that hour made me rich.

"Cheese and kisses," wrote she, "are considered good fare in my South land for all who have other resources in their hearts." And I mentally averred that half of that would be enough for me.

And so we went ahead—oh, progressive step! And we were never poor again.

But there came a more heroic hour. It was hard, so hard to do, but the pressure rendered concealment quite impossible, for the note I had endorsed was handed in for suit. So I told her one twilight hour that our already limited income must be shared with [11] an unromantic creditor. There was a little tightening of the lips, then of the arms, then of those mutual heart cords entangled in their eternal root.

We were boarding then, three rooms in a family hotel, and when I returned next day at evening I found everything—books, furniture, piano—all moved to a room upon the topmost story. I was directed thither by the smiling landlord, more enlightened than I, and I entered with furtive misgivings in my soul and with visions of that spacious Southern home before my rueful eyes.

But she was there, radiant and triumphant, still flushed with exercise of hand and heart, viewing proudly her proof of a new axiom that two or more bodies may occupy the same space at the selfsame time.

"I am so glad you didn't come before," she said. "I wanted to be all settled before you saw it. This is just as good as we had before, and only half the price. Isn't it cozy? And everything just fits. And we are away from all the noise. And look at that lovely view. And now we can pay off that horrid note. Aren't you glad?"

"But, Emmeline, my heart breaks to see you caged like this. It is noble of you, just like you, but I cannot forgive myself that I have brought you to this," said I, my voice trembling with pain and joy. [12]

"Why, dear one, how can you speak like that? We have everything here, and each other too, and we shall be caged together."

I kissed that girlish face again and blessed the gift of heaven, murmuring only, in tones that could not be heard, "He setteth the

solitary in families," and as we went down together I wondered if that sudden elevation had not brought us nearer heaven than we had been below.

It was largely owing to this lion-hearted courage that I now found myself swiftly borne towards the vacant pulpit which yawned in stately expectation of its weekly candidate.

The invitation "to conduct divine services in St. Cuthbert's, whose pulpit is now vacant," had come unsought from the kirk session of that distant temple.

St. Cuthbert's was the stately cathedral of all adjoining Presbyterianism. It was the pride and crown of a town which stood in prosperous contentment upon the verge of cityhood. Its history was great and honourable; its traditions warlike and evangelical; its people intelligent and intense. Its vast area was famed for its throng of acute and reflective hearers, almost every man of whom was a sermon taster, while its officers were the acknowledged possessors of letters patent to the true ecclesiastical nobility. In my student days, medals and scholarships were never quoted among the trophies of our divinity men if it could be justly said of any one that he had preached twice before the hard heads of St. Cuthbert's. This triumph was recited with the same reverent air as when men used to say, "He preached before the Queen."

Some hundreds of miles must be traversed before I reached the place, but only some four-and-twenty hours before I reached the time, of my trial sermons. Therefore did I convert my car into a study and my unsteady knee into a desk, giving myself to the rehearsal of those discourses by which I was to stand or fall. Every weak hand thereof I laboured to strengthen, and every feeble knee I endeavoured to confirm. And what motley hours were those I spent on that fast-flying train! All my reflections tended to devotion, but yet my errand was throbbing with ambition.

Whereupon I fell into a strange and not unprofitable reverie, painfully striving to separate my thoughts, the sheep from the goats, and to reconcile them the one to the other. I knew well enough the human frame to be persuaded that ambition could not altogether be cast out from the spirit of a man, which led me to reflect upon its possible place and purpose if controlled by a master

hand beyond the [14] hand of time. I strove to discover my inmost motive, far behind all other aims, and consoled myself with the hope that God might make it the dominant and sovereign one, to which all others might be unconscious ministers, even as all other lesser ones obey the driving wheel.

I somehow felt that the vision of that radiant face at home, for whom ambition sprung like a fountain, was in no wise inconsistent with the holiest work which awaited me on the morrow.

At thought of her, my ambition, earth-born though it was, seemed to be robed in white and to be unashamedly ministering unto God. And I was fain to believe at last that this very hope of a larger place was from Himself, and that He was the shepherd of the sheep and of the goats alike. Whereupon I fell upon my sermons afresh with a clearer conscience, which means a stronger mind, and swiftly prayed, even while I worked, that the Lord of the harvest would winnow my tumultuous thoughts, garnering the wheat unto Himself and burning the tares with unquenchable fire.

Onward rushed the hours, and onward rolled the train in its desperate struggle with them, till the setting sun, victorious over both, reminded me that I would be in New Jedboro before the dusk deepened into dark. Then restored I my sermon notes, re [15]burnished and repaired, to the trusty keeping of my well-worn valise, settling myself for one of those delicious baths of thought to be truly enjoyed only on the farther side of toil.

I had but well begun to compose my mind and to forecast the probable experiences of the morrow, when a rich Scotch voice broke in upon me with the unmistakable inquiry, "And where micht ye be gaein?"

I responded with the name of New Jedboro, assuming the air of a man who was bent only upon a welcome visit to long-separated friends. But I had reckoned without my host. My interrogator was a Scot, with the Scot's incurable curiosity, always to be estimated by the indifference of his air. If his face be eloquent of profound unconcern, then may you know that a fever of inquisitiveness is burning at his heart.

My questioner seemed to scarcely listen for my answer, yet a tutored eye could tell that he was camping on my trail.

His next interrogation was launched with courteous composure: "Ye'll no' be the man wha's expeckit in St. Cuthbert's ower the Sabbath?"

I now saw that this was no diluted Scotsman. Bred on Canadian soil, he was yet original and pure. He had struck the native Scottish note, the ecclesias [16]tical. Like all his countrymen, he had a native taste for a minister. His instincts were towards the Kirk, and for all things akin to Psalm or Presbytery he intuitively took the scent. I have maintained to this day that he sniffed my sermons from afar, undeceived by the worldly flavour of my rusty bag.

I collected myself heroically, and replied that I was looking forward to the discharge of the high duty to which he had referred. Upon this admission he moved nearer, as a great lawyer stalks his quarry in the witness box. He eyed me solemnly for a moment, with the look of one taking aim, and then said slowly –

"I'm no' an elder in that kirk."

"Are you not?" said I, with as generous an intonation of surprise as conscience would permit.

"I'm no' an elder," he repeated. "But I gang till it," he added.

Then followed a pause, which I dared to break with the remark, "I am told it is a spacious edifice."

He merely glanced at me, as if to say that all irrelevant conversation was out of place, and then continued –

"And I'm no' the precentor; I'm no' the man, ye ken, that lifts the tune." [17]

I nodded sympathetically, trying to convey my sense of the mistake the congregation had made in its choice of both elders and precentor.

"Ye wud say, to luik at me, that I'm no' an office-seeker, an' ye're richt. But I haud an office for a' that."

This time I smiled as if light had come to me, and as one who has been reassured in his belief in an overruling Providence.

"What office do you hold?" said I.

"Ye wudna guess in a twalmonth. I'm no' the treasurer, as ye're thinkin'—I'm the beadle."

I uttered a brief eulogy upon the honour and responsibility of that position, pointing out that the beadle had a dignity all his own, as well as the elders and other officers of the kirk.

He endorsed my views with swift complacent nods.

"That's what I aye think o' when I see the elders on the Sabbath mornin'," said he; "forbye, there's severals o' *them*, but wha ever heard tell o' mair than ae beadle? And what's mair, I had raither be a door-keeper in the Lord's hoose than dwell in tents o' sin. Them's Dauvit's words, and they aye come to me when I compare mysel' wi' the elders."

I hurriedly commended his reference to the Scriptures, at the same time avoiding any share in his [18] rather significant classification, remarking on the other hand that elders had their place, and that authority was indispensable in all churches, and the very essence of the Presbyterian system.

He interrupted me, fearing he had been misunderstood.

"Mind ye," he declared fervently, "I'm no' settin' mysel' up even wi' the minister. I regard him as mair important than me—far mair important," he affirmed, with reckless humility, "but the elders, they are juist common fowk like mysel'. An' at times they are mair than common. Me an' the minister bear a deal frae the elders. He aye bids me to bear wi' them, an' I aye bid him no' to mind. I tell him whiles that we'd meet an' we'd greet whaur the elders cease frae troublin'—them's the poet's words."

We were now some two miles or so from the town and the church wherein he exercised his gifts and magnified his office; and my rugged friend, dismissing the elders for the time, reverted to the inquiry he had seen fit previously to ignore.

"Ye were askin' me about the kirk."

"Yes," said I in a chastened voice, "I asked you if it was not very large."

"Thae was no' yir exact words, but I ken yir meanin'. It's a gran' kirk, St. Cuthbert's, an' ye'll [19] need to speak oot—no' to yell, ye ken, for I'm nigh deafened wi' the roarin' o' the candidates sin' oor kirk was preached vacant by the Presbytery. Dinna be ower lang; and be sure to read a' the psalm afore ye sit doon, and hae the sough o' Sinai in yir discoorse, specially at the mornin' diet; an' aye back up the Scriptures wi' the catechism, an' hae a word or twa about the Covenanters, them as sealed their testimony wi' their bluid, ye ken. Ye'll tak' ma advice as kindly; it's mair than likely we'll never meet again gin the morrow's gone."

I thanked him for his counsel and reached for my bag, at the signal of escaping steam.

The car door had just closed behind me when I felt a hand upon my arm and heard a now familiar voice—

"An' dinna pray ower muckle for yir ain devoted folk at hame; an' dinna ask the King an' Head o' the Kirk to fetch till us a wise under-shepherd o' the flock."

With a word of additional acknowledgment I stepped on to the station platform, but my parley with a burly cabman was interrupted by the same voice whispering in my ear—

"Ye nicht mind the elders in yir prayer; gin they were led mair into the licht it wad dae nae harm to onybody."

[20]

## II

### *A MAN With a SECRET*

There was no one about the station to welcome me and none to direct, but there were many to stare and wonder.

The moderator of the vacant kirk had provided me with the address of the house to which he said I should repair. I was in no wise mortified by this apparent lack of hospitality, for the aforesaid moderator had reminded me in his postscript that the folk of St. Cuthbert's were notoriously Scotch, untrained to any degree of devotion at the beginning, but famous for the fervour of their loyalty at the close of their ministers' careers.

Whether or not I should have any career at all amongst them was the subject of my thoughts as I wended my way to "Inglewood," for such was the melodious title of the house which was to be my home during my sojourn in New Jedboro.

Beautiful for situation it proved to be, nestling among its sentinels of oak, upon the highest hill of seven which garrisoned the town. The signs of wealth and good taste were everywhere about, and my probationer's heart was beating fast when I [21] pulled the polished silver knob whose patrician splendour had survived the invasion of all electrical upstarts.

I heard the answering bell far within, breaking again and again into its startled cry, and my soul answered it with peals of such humiliation as is known only to the man whose heart affords a home to that ill-matched pair, the discomfiture of the candidate and the pride of the Presbyterian.

The door was opened by the master of the house, Michael Blake, a man of forty-five or so, the wealthy senior of New Jedboro's greatest manufacturing firm.

I suppose he looked first at me, but my first sensation was of his keen eye swiftly falling on the shabby travelling-bag in my left

hand, my right kept disengaged for any friendly overture which might await me.

Oh, the shame and the anguish of those swift glances towards one's travelling-bag! Can no kind genius devise a scheme for their temporary concealment such as the modern book agent has brought to its perfection, full armed beneath the treacherous shelter of his cloak?

I broke the silence: "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Blake?"

"Yes, that is my name," responded a rich, soulful [22] voice, resonant with the finest Scottish flavour, "and what can I do for you, sir?"

Presuming that it would be hardly delicate for me to state the particular duty I was expecting him to discharge, I betook myself to the association of ideas, and replied —

"I am to preach in St. Cuthbert's to-morrow," hoping that this might suggest to him the information he had sought.

Swift and beautiful was the transformation. The soul of hospitality leaped from his face, stern and secretive though it was. His eye, which had seemed to hold my blushing bag at bay, turned now upon me with all the music of a great welcome in its glance. He looked at me with that frank abruptness which true cordiality creates, and when he took my hand in his my heart leaped to the warm shelter of its grasp.

"I have been looking for you; you are welcome here," he said, in the quietest of tones. He drew me gently within the massive door, and in that moment I knew that I was in the custody of love.

A grandfather's clock, proud and stately in its sense of venerable faithfulness, was gravely ticking off the moments with hospitality in its tone. A pleasant-faced lassie showed me to my room, reminding me that the evening meal awaited my descent. [23]

My host justified my every impression. While we disposed of the plain but appetizing fare, whose crown was the speckled trout which his skill had lured from home, he submitted me to the kindest of cross-examinations concerning my past, my scholarship, my evangelical positions, my household, and much else that nestled

among them all. Throughout, I felt the charm and the power of his gentleness, and under its secret influence I yielded up what many another would have sought in vain. Some natures there are which search you as the sun lays bare the flowers, making for itself a pathway to their inmost heart, every petal opening before its siege of love.

But reciprocity there was none. His lips seemed to stand like inexorable sentinels before his heart, in league with its great secret, the guardians of a past which no man had heard revealed. One or two tentative attempts to discover his antecedents were foiled by his charming taciturnity.

"I came from the old country many years ago," was the only information he vouchsafed me.

The evening was spent in conversation which never flamed but never flagged. My increasing opportunity for observation served but to confirm my conviction that I was confronted with a man who had one great and separate secret hidden within the impenetrable recesses of a contrite heart. He said little about St. [24] Cuthbert's or the morrow, his most significant observation being to the effect that the serious-minded of the kirk were looking forward to my appearance with hopeful interest.

After he had bidden me good-night, he again sought me in my chamber, interrupting the devotions which I was striving to conduct in oblivion of to-morrow and in the sombre light of the Judgment Day.

"Will you do me a kindness in the kirk to-morrow?" he said, with almost pathetic eagerness.

I responded fervently that nothing could be a greater kindness to myself than the sense of one bestowed on him.

"Very well, then, will you give us the Fifty-first Psalm to sing at the morning service—it always seems to me that it is the soul's staple food; and let us begin with the fifth verse—

"Behold, Thou in the inward parts  
With truth delighted art."