

Baptized a Dog — Was Dismissed from His Church

The Rev. Mr. Curtis's Sense of Humor Moves the Elders of the Presbytery of Boston to Expel Him, But the Loyal Congregation of His Church Refuse to Permit Him to Be Punished

Buster Porter, who is now known as the only "Full-fledged, Baptized Presbyterian" Dog in 'Boston.



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"What is the pup's name, Mrs. Porter?" the Rev. Mr. Curtis inquired.

"Buster," Mrs. Porter replied. "He's a fine dog," Mr. Curtis remarked, and grasping a glass of water and dipping his fingers in it he sprinkled the dog and said: "Buster Porter, I baptize thee a full-fledged Presbyterian."

REV. EDWIN CURTIS blessed a salad—and the elders of the Boston Presbytery frowned upon him.

He thanked the Lord for fried potatoes—and they asked him to resign.

Then he baptized a dog—and it cost him his pulpit.

The Rev. Mr. Curtis is an ordained minister. Also he's an Englishman. A Britisher and an ecclesiastic with an inappropriate sense of humor—this strange combination has lost him his church and threatens to lose him his livelihood. The Boston Presbytery has ousted him.

It was Buster Porter, the baptized dog, who started it all. And now the Presbytery is in a turmoil. It's a case of elders versus members. The flock wants their humorous minister. The elders won't let him stay.

The First Church of exclusive Brookline, of which Mr. Curtis is ex-pastor, has threatened to secede from the Presbyterian denomination. And since the First Church is the most powerful of all Presbyterian churches in New England the affair assumes important proportions—all because of Buster, a Salad and those Fried Potatoes.

Mrs. Melbourne Porter, of Wellesley, Mass., complained in Buster's name. Buster, though ordained a "full-fledged Presbyterian," is only a mongrel who presumes strict neutrality. His mistress talks for him. "I remember the day very well," Mrs. Porter declares, "that Mr. Curtis baptized Buster. The poor dog—he didn't know what to do; but Mr. Curtis considered it a great joke. "What's the pup's name, Mrs. Porter?" he asked me. "Buster," I told him. "He's a fine dog," Mr. Curtis remarked, and grasping a glass of water and dipping his fingers in it he sprinkled the dog and said: "Buster Porter, I baptize thee a full-fledged Presbyterian." "I was too horrified to speak. Even Buster was dumfounded. For Buster is a very nice little dog, but he's no church member. The idea of making him a Presbyterian! A full-fledged one, at that! "Now it's one thing to be a Presbyterian yourself, but it's another thing to have your dog baptized into your faith. Sacrilegious, I call it. So I told the elders of the church about it, and they requested me to put it all down in writing and to swear to it before a justice of the peace. Ridiculous conduct, they said it was, for a minister—going round baptizing dogs." So much for Mrs. Porter and Buster. Mrs. Gerude Harvey tells of the salads and the potatoes. "Mr. Curtis boarded with me for four or five weeks," Mrs. Harvey explained, "and he never but twice said a blessing. One

Rev. and Mrs. Edwin Curtis, the Expelled Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Brookline.



Mrs. Harvey Thought the Whole Dinner Was Very Good and Was Surprised, When the Salad Was Brought On, to Hear Rev. Mr. Curtis Exclaim, "O Lord, We Thank Thee for This Salad."

evening we had salad with our dinner. Mr. Curtis raised his eyes to heaven and clasping his hands he prayed. "O Lord, we thank Thee for this salad," he said fervently. "Mrs. Curtis, his wife, thought it was funny, but she knew it was improper. "Oh, my little love," she said to Mr. Curtis, "that was a naughty blessing." "Then they both laughed. A queer idea of a joke, picking out one little salad for a blessing and not thanking God for the rest of my good meal. "Another time, 'O Lord, we thank Thee for the fried potatoes,' he said."

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Harvey compared notes and discussed their experiences with Rev. Mr. Curtis. Then they decided to take the matter straight to the Presbytery. And the Presbytery deposed the minister, finding him guilty of the Buster, the Salad and the Fried Potatoes charges. Under the laws of the Presbyterian Church the authority to assign a pastor rests with the Presbytery and the Presbytery does not want the Rev. Mr. Curtis. But the congregation of the Rev. Mr. Curtis's church has, for the most part, been loyal to him and feels that he has been punished with undue severity. They insist that they want Mr. Curtis as their pastor and threats have been made to bring the matter into the courts. A motion has been passed giving the vacancy and supply committee, which inaugurated the action against Mr. Curtis, right to employ legal counsel. It is alto-

gether probable that the civil courts may be called upon to settle the case. Elder Clark, of the Brookline Church, has already gone on record against the action of the elders of the Presbytery. "We are not in the Presbytery looking for sympathy," said Mr. Clark, one of Rev. Mr. Curtis's supporters. "In behalf of my church let me say that the Boston Presbytery will not have much more to do with us. We're through with it." The elders, standing firmly by their decision, declare that the question of Mr. Curtis's removal has narrowed itself down to one of "law and order, or anarchy." "The dignity, authority and honor of the church are at stake," reads the new and revised report of the removal committee. "We trust that the Presbytery will not allow itself to be intimidated from doing its duty by threats, however menacing; or by epithets, however uncomplimentary." "The fitness of a minister depends upon his prudence, gravity and Godly conversation. The wishes of the majority of the congregation should be set aside. And, though it be against the protest of both pastor and people, the governing body should dissolve the pastoral relation." Then follows the repeated recital of the blessings of salad and potatoes, and the baptism of the dog Buster, the famous "full-fledged Presbyterian cur." Clarence A. Young, of the Roxbury Presbyterian Church, chairman of the vacancy



The Old, Wealthy and Well-Known First Presbyterian Church of Brookline, Mass.

the Rev. Mr. Curtis's First Church is one of the wealthiest and most influential of the Presbyterian churches in New England. Its loss would be a severe blow to the denomination. Mr. Curtis for some time heard that there were rumors of complaint about the dog, salad and potatoes, but regarded the matter as too absurd and trivial for serious consideration. Not until the vote of the Presbytery to throw him out of the church did the clergyman discuss the matter.

"Malicious-minded women," Mr. Curtis calls the ladies who signed the complaints against his conduct.

"Malicious females!" he repeated. "They've made a tempest in a teapot. A mousetrap from a mole-hill."

"The baptism was a joke, and so were the blessings. Yet why, after all, isn't it perfectly ethical and religious to thank the

Lord for any particular dish instead of for the whole meal. Can't a minister thank God for anything that's good. Quaker husbands, I've heard, say grace before kissing their wives.

"For what I am about to receive, O Lord, I thank Thee," they say. Then they get their kiss.

"As a matter of fact, I don't even remember the episodes of the salad and potato graces. Anything I said was a joke—and Mrs. Harvey knew it. When I sprinkled water on Buster it was a joke—and Mrs. Porter knew it."

"You are familiar," he continued, "with the tactics of the little dog who barks all over everywhere, while everybody tolerates the noise because it is undignified to stop it. Well, that is an analogy applicable to the present case. I have borne, because I knew that the noise was from a very few of my people.

"I came from England, and without seeking any preference among them, they received me into their hearts and desired my ministry. But that did not prevent me from being regarded as an usurper and an outsider by a section of the Presbytery. "During the year of probation incumbent upon any minister of another denomination coming from a foreign country, the bulk of the church has, because of its choice of pastor, received no sympathy from such ministers as were appointed by the Presbytery to exercise control over it. "On the other hand they have throughout lent their support to the insignificant minority in the church in their efforts to block all progress according to the rule of the majority. The complaint of the majority is that Presbyterial oversight has been unsympathetic and autocratic. Individual ministers attempting to force their will upon the majority, contrary to the people's reason and judgment. The minority, consisting of a few families, be-

ing previously antagonistic to majority rule, and not, as has been assumed, to my personality, have been instigated to a systematic course of opposition to my regime. "Far from the wishes of the majority counting in this matter, the ministers of the Boston Presbytery referred to now seek to use this nursed and coddled faction as a lever to oust from the field the man who is the choice of the people, notwithstanding their earnest desires for his installation.

"There is nothing against my character or credentials, as is shown by a letter from Dr. Young, chairman of the committee on vacancy and supply, which has charge of the matter.

"Dr. Young said at the meeting of Presbytery that he did not know what the majority was, but that that did not matter anyway, and he told me that if the congregation extends me another call he does not think that Presbytery would sustain it, and vote to install me as pastor.

"After an adverse criticism of considerable length, in which he assumed an incorrect and unfair estimate of the work and condition of the church during the past year, we were denied the right to vindicate our position in the meeting. The decent and orderly applause by which I was supported, when I rose to speak, was taken by the moderator—himself a member of the vacancy and supply committee whose report had just been given by Mr. Young—as the signal to silence me by going into private session. I contend that the applause was no justification for so precipitate a withdrawal, since it was but a plea for a fair hearing for both sides. "The church is considerably stronger financially and numerically this year than it has been ever before, and it is the view of those who have been in association with it for over a quarter of a century that it was never animated by a more healthy and progressive spirit."

Friends of Mr. Curtis are taking a little dig at Mrs. Harvey and her board. They say the minister thanked the Lord for his fried potatoes in sarcasm, because, as a matter of fact, he was very, very tired of them—having had them every night for weeks. As for the salad—well, that, they say, was a treat, and his thanks were sincere. The landlady, they say, missed the real point of those two facetious graces.

"It all reminds me of the tale in Guilliver's Travels," declares Mr. Curtis. "You remember the great war that was waged over which end of an egg should be cracked first. And now look at the war that's waged over a joke! With Presbytery shaken to its foundations! "I came to Boston from England fourteen months ago, as I have said. Because I was a foreigner and of another denomination the elders put me on a year's probation.

"Then they set about to find a lever with which to oust me. Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Harvey supplied the demand. Whereupon the elders removed me."

Friends of Mr. Curtis—and they are many—are urging him to bring suit against Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Harvey. The majority of his church members are with him, as well as many Brookline citizens of other denominations. But the elders declare that they will no longer tolerate him and his jokes. So the minister is jobless.

Everybody has taken sides one way or the other and had plenty to say except Buster.