

Pain and the Scientist, F. Scott Fitzgerald

Walter Hamilton Bartney moved to Middleton because it was quiet and offered him an opportunity of studying law, which he should have done long ago. He chose a quiet house rather out in the suburbs of the village, for as he reasoned to himself, "Middleton is a suburb and remarkably quiet at that. Therefore a suburb of a suburb must be the very depth of solitude, and that is what I want." So Bartney chose a small house in the suburbs and settled down. There was a vacant lot on his left, and on his right Skiggs, the famous Christian Scientist. It is because of Skiggs that this story was written.

Bartney, like the very agreeable young man he was, decided that it would be only neighborly to pay Skiggs a visit, not that he was very much interested in the personality of Mr. Skiggs, but because he had never seen a real Christian Scientist and he felt that his life would be empty without the sight of one.

However, he chose a most unlucky time for his visit. It was one night, dark as pitch that, feeling restless, he set off as the clock struck ten to investigate and become acquainted. He strode out of his lot and along the path that went by name of a road, feeling his way between bushes and rocks and keeping his eye on the solitary light that burned in Mr. Skiggs' house.

"It would be blamed unlucky for me if he should take a notion to turn out that light," he muttered through his clenched teeth. "I'd be lost. I'd just have to sit down and wait until morning."

He approached the house, felt around cautiously, and, reaching for what he thought was a step, uttered an exclamation of pain, for a large stone had rolled down over his leg and pinned him to the earth. He grunted, swore, and tried to move the rock, but he was held powerless by the huge stone, and his efforts were unavailing.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Mr. Skiggs!"

There was no answer.

"Help, in there," he cried again, "Help!"

A light was lit upstairs and a head, topped with a conical shaped night-cap, poked itself out of the window like an animated jack-in-the-box.

"Who's there?" said the night-cap in a high-pitched querulous voice. "Who's there? Speak, or I fire."

"Don't fire! It's me—Bartney, your neighbor. I've had an accident, a nasty ankle wrench, and there's a stone on top of me."

"Bartney?" queried the night cap, nodding pensively. "Who's Bartney?"

Bartney swore inwardly.

"I'm your neighbor. I live next door. This stone is very heavy. If you would come down here—"

"How do I know you're Bartney, whoever he is?" demanded the night cap. "How do I know you won't get me out there and blackjack me?"

"For heaven's sake," cried Bartney, "look and see. Turn a searchlight on me, and see if I'm not pinned down."

"I have no searchlight," came the voice from above.

"Then you'll have to take a chance. I can't stay here all night."

"Then go away. I am not stopping you," said the night cap with a decisive squeak in his voice.

"Mr. Skiggs," said Bartney in desperation, "I am in mortal agony and—"

"You are not in mortal agony," announced Mr. Skiggs.

"What? Do you still think I'm trying to entice you out here to murder you?"

"I repeat, you are not in mortal agony. I am convinced now that you really think you are hurt, but I assure you, you are not."

"He's crazy," thought Bartney.

"I shall endeavor to prove to you that you are not, thus causing you more relief than I would if I lifted the stone. I am very moderate. I will treat you now at the rate of three dollars an hour."

"An hour?" shouted Bartney fiercely. "You come down here and roll this stone off me, or I'll skin you alive!"

"Even against your will," went on Mr. Skiggs. "I feel called upon to treat you, for it is a duty to everyone to help the injured, or rather those who fancy themselves injured. Now, clear your mind of all sensation, and we will begin the treatment."

"Come down here, you mean, low-browed fanatic!" yelled Bartney, forgetting his pain in a paroxysm of rage. "Come down here, and I'll drive every bit of Christian Science out of your head."

"To begin with," began the shrill falsetto from the window, "there is no pain—absolutely none. Do you begin to have an inkling of that?"

"No," shouted Bartney. "You, you—" his voice was lost in a gurgle of impotent rage.

"Now, all is mind. Mind is everything. Matter is nothing—absolutely nothing. You are well. You fancy you are hurt, but you are not."

"You lie," shrieked Bartney.

Unheeding, Mr. Skiggs went on.

"Thus, if there is no pain, it can not act on your mind. A sensation is not physical. If you had no brain, there would be no pain, for what you call pain acts on the brain. You see?"

"Oh-h," cried Bartney, "if you saw what a bottomless well of punishment you were digging for yourself, you'd cut out that monkey business."

"Therefore, as so-called pain is a mental sensation, your ankle doesn't hurt you. Your brain may imagine it does, but all sensation goes to the brain. You are very foolish when you complain of hurt—"

Bartney's patience wore out. He drew in his breath, and let out a yell that echoed and re-echoed through the night air. He repeated it again and again, and at length he heard the sound of footsteps coming up the road.

"Hello!" came a voice.

Bartney breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

"Come here! I've had an accident," he called, and a minute later the night

watchman's brawny arms had rolled the stone off him, and he staggered to his feet.

"Good night," called the Christian Scientist sweetly. "I hope I have made some impression on you."

"You certainly have," called back Bartney as he limped off, his hand on the watchman's shoulder, "one I won't forget."

Two days later, as Bartney sat with his foot on a pillow he pulled an unfamiliar envelope out of his mail and opened it. It read:

WILLIAM BARTNEY.
To HEPEZIA SKIGGS, DR.
Treatment by Christian Science—\$3.00. Payment by check or money order.

The weeks wore on. Bartney was up and around. Out in his yard he started a flower garden and became a floral enthusiast. Every day he planted, and the next day he would weed what he had planted. But it gave him something to do, for law was tiresome at times.

One bright summer's day, he left his house and strolled towards the garden, where the day before he had planted in despair some "store bought" pansies. He perceived to his surprise a long, thin, slippery-looking figure bending over, picking his new acquisitions. With quiet tread he approached, and, as the invader turned around, he said severely:

"What are you doing, sir?"

"I was plucking-er-a few posies—"

The long, thin, slippery looking figure got no further. Though the face had been strange to Bartney, the voice, a thin, querulous falsetto, was one he would never forget. He advanced slowly, eyeing the owner of that voice, as the wolf eyes his prey.

"Well, Mr. Skiggs, how is it I find you on my property?"

Mr. Skiggs appeared unaccountably shy and looked the other way.

"I repeat," said Bartney, "that I find you here on my property—and in my power."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Skiggs, squirming in alarm.

Bartney grabbed him by the collar, and shook him as a terrier does a rat.

"You conceited imp of Christian Science! You miserable hypocrite! What?" he demanded fiercely, as Skiggs emitted a cry of protest. "You yell. How dare you? Don't you know there is no such thing as pain? Come on, now, give me some of that Christian Science. Say 'mind is everything'. Say it!"

Mr. Skiggs, in the midst of his jerky course, said quaveringly, "Mind is everyth-thing."

"Pain is nothing," urged his tormenter grimly.

"P-Pain is nothing," repeated Mr. Skiggs feelingly.

The shaking continued.

"Remember, Skiggs, this is all for the good of the cause. I hope you're taking it to heart. Remember, such is life, therefore life is such. Do you see?"

He left off shaking, and proceeded to entice Skiggs around by a grip on his collar, the scientist meanwhile kicking and struggling violently.

"Now," said Bartney, "I want you to assure me that you feel no pain. Go on, do it!"

"I f-feel-ouch," he exclaimed as he passed over a large stone in his course, "no pain."

"Now," said Bartney, "I want two dollars for the hours' Christian Science treatment I have given you. Out with it."

Skiggs hesitated, but the look of Bartney's eyes and a tightening of Bartney's grip convinced him, and he unwillingly tendered a bill. Bartney tore it to pieces and distributed the fragments to the wind.

"Now, you may go."

Skiggs, when his collar was released, took to his heels, and his flying footsteps crossed the boundary line in less time than you would imagine.

"Good-bye, Mr. Skiggs," called Bartney pleasantly. "Any other time you want a treatment come over. The price is always the same. I see you know one thing I didn't have to teach you. There's no such thing as pain, when somebody else is the goat."

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