

The Fireside.

A SERMON WITH AN AIM.

"Dear me!" sighed the minister. "I am completely discouraged about preaching. It does very little good. People come because they feel they ought, but they do not listen as if they cared much. About all one can do these days is to keep things going."

"After all, it is easier to preach than to practise," answered his wife, with a smile.

"Oh, we expect our wives to do the practising! It is enough to ask preaching of a man. But, seriously, Mary, I have preached on the leading topics of the day, and the great evils of the age, and I have taken up the great fundamental truths of the Bible, and it all had a soothing effect. I have thundered denunciations against sin, looking up at the ceiling, and I have plead with sinners Sunday evenings when I knew all were church members, because I had those sermons ready."

"Perhaps it might pay to drop writing sermons and get the unconverted out to church," mused the wife; "but your work is so different from mine, it is hard to suggest." She had been married long enough to suggest rather than to advise. "No woman would fire around aimlessly as you men do in preaching. A woman is always working towards some objective point. It may be a frivolous one like begging silk for a crazy quilt, or embroidering a baby's petticoat. You may have noticed that women talk about the subject most on their hearts. They are not logical, or learned, I admit, but they talk for a purpose. Mrs. Brown talked me out of a dollar yesterday, and Mrs. White got some unwise expression of sympathy that she came after, and Miss Sharp got a promise for her work. That is why women can carry on church fairs and raise money so successfully. They are in such dead earnest. It is the same way when one gets the salvation of souls on her heart — which isn't often. Men are more subjective than women. Yes, they are. Women have very little individual living. They are lost in their husbands or children. That's why they can be more religious in feeling. You preachers dream over your books while we women are finding God as best we may, living every moment for some one else."

This was a little too much. "Since you seem to think earning the living by preaching is subjective dreaming in the study, change places with me this week," the minister answered coldly.

"Very well," she replied cheerfully. "Of course I know it takes reading, and hunting up illustrations, and study on Bible exegetics, in all of which I shall be very weak; but I can write about what a busy woman needs on Sunday to sweeten and strengthen her for another hard week."

"I would like to see you do it," he said stiffly. "I am quite willing to look after the things you do in the home."

"I am sorry that Susan is laid up for a few days with the gripe. You know she often has little sick spells, but I manage to get along, so you will. You can have Bertha wait on her when she comes from school. I have given her her breakfast and her medicine, so she will get along for a few hours. I had to hear Nellie's spelling, and find Rob's mittens, and advise Bertha about her

recitation, so the dishes are not washed or the baby bathed, and the children may have slighted the upstairs work. You wanted an apple pie for dinner and a roast is ordered. You can select your own vegetables. Keep the baby off the floor in the high chair when he gets tired of the carriage. There is some fine ironing that must be finished, and the buttons on your Sunday coat changed, and Nellie's best dress lengthened for the party; and you must see how Grandma Parker is when you take baby out for her ride, and stop at the poor woman's on Ames street and tell her what to do for her teething baby. She sent for me yesterday. You may be thankful you have not a gifted wife, or you would have to lead some meeting with it all, or write a paper for a missionary society. Above all, let no one interrupt me, and keep an eye on the furnace drafts. Oh, yes, bread must be set this evening. You must get through in time for prayer-meeting, for if a minister's wife can't do as much as to get across the street, who else will make an effort?"

"I did not know that Susan" — the minister gasped; but the study door had slammed upstairs, and his wife had begun to look for a sermon. He reflected that it was nothing new for Susan to take to her bed when his wife was especially busy, so he had no reason to complain. The door-bell rang three times while the new nurse was getting the baby ready for the day. The last time the washbowl was upset, and the baby was paddling in a pool of water on his papa's return. This meant another clean dress, which went on in no gentle manner, and a pitched battle ensued. But no signs came from the study.

It is needless to tell of the woes of that morning. The preacher scalded his hand washing dishes, but had no time to attend to the burn. In a very short time the children came bounding in for dinner, calling "mamma" in their usual loving tones. Then the little woman relented, and ran down just in time to prevent the baby, who was wiping up the kitchen floor, from swallowing a piece of glass, part of a tumbler the father had let drop.

"Mary, the baby had been so troublesome and the door bell rang so often, I haven't much for dinner. You are right about the stove having a poor draft. I'll have the stove man up before night. The meat and potatoes are not warmed through, and there is nothing else."

"Oh, we'll soon scramble a few eggs and have a good cup of tea and bread and jam and cookies, and you can get a six o'clock dinner. Hurry with the table, Bertha. As soon as I get Jamie in his high chair we will help papa get a fine lunch. It often happens that way, dear. A woman has to be patient and quick and full of resources to be a good Christian. I know just what kind of a sermon a woman needs, but I am not used to putting my thoughts on paper. I must do as one does in house work: In spite of many perplexities a woman must hold to the main track. Sometimes it is washing, or baking, or making a poor girl do it. You will catch up this afternoon after you get baby to sleep, and my thoughts will come more readily after I have made a few pastoral visits in this glorious sunshine."

"Here, Mary, I have a new fam-

ily who ought to be seen this very day. would you mind going back to your part of the work? I invited the elder for supper and to stay all night. I am sure I know now what you mean by needing a sermon on patience. Only I am not fit to preach to you. I think I broke half of the Ten Commandments over that pesky stove," and the meek tone and pleading look would have melted any heart.

"Certainly, dear, I'll take the practice part," she laughed. "Oh, I know you meet your temptations and trials, too. I only meant to suggest that if you could enter more fully into the daily trials of your members, perhaps you would find each week some one's special need; and human nature is so much the same that, if you really comfort and uplift a certain person, you would do the same to others. What one mother needs, they all need; and what one young man should know, others ought to know. But, you blessed boy, you have burned your hand and never called me."

"You are the blessed one," he said, smiling with the light in his eyes a woman loves to see. "You do not need my sermons."

"Yes, it is 'line upon line and precept upon precept' we all need," she affirmed. "I am proud of my husband's learning and forceful statements of truth, and, John, you preach no more aimlessly than your brothers. I am not a scholar, you know — only a common sort of a woman."

"You are just the right sort," the minister said, giving her a quick kiss as the little woman opened a jar of jam.

"Look here, Mary," he said, a few days later; taking out his note book. "Brown needs help in business temptations — says it is impossible to make money and be a Christian. Mrs. King needs patience in her home affairs — has a poor girl, a peculiar old mother-in-law, and troublesome children, nearly always sick. Her husband is evidently a cold, unsympathetic, selfish fellow. What you need, will fit her."

"Leaving out sick children, mother-in-law, and especially selfish husband!" interrupted Mary.

"Thank you; we'll say 'exacting, but well-meaning.' Miss White needs grace for physical pain, and Mrs. Watts patience to bear poverty pleasantly. I have thought of a text that will take in all these cases."

"For our sakes He became poor," is a good poverty text," suggested the wife. "I should be afraid to aim at several cases for fear I should fire in between the ranks."

"You are persistent in the meekest way," laughed the minister. "Since you won't give up, I'll preach to one woman next Sunday."

The minister went into the pulpit after very earnest prayer. He was going to give a message of hope and comfort that might change the current of a life. There was no telling what it might mean to Mrs. King's family if she found peace. Her face showed that her influence for Christ in her own home could not be very decided. She would repel, and not win, while she was feeling so grieved over her own burdens. With her earnest nature she would be a power in the church and town if she were a consecrated Christian. Mrs. King sat in her pew stern and forbidding. She had been tried to the point of bitter words with her husband that morning, and he had taunted her with her religious profession and her failings in the home. She had not intended to pay much attention to the sermon, but the text attracted her, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is

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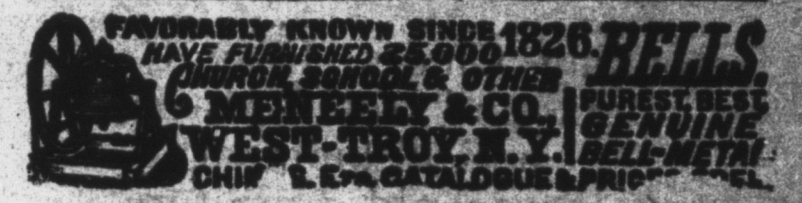
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made perfect in weakness." I wish you could have seen that woman's face as she listened to the sermon. She saw her own troubles spoken of freely, and then heard of women who had far more to bear — women who had the pains and trials of motherhood and none of its compensations; women in darkened heathen homes; women who were wives of criminals; women who faced starvation for themselves, and, harder still, for their babes. How attractive Mrs. King's home seemed in contrast. She had never known want or severe labor for daily bread that she should make such a fuss about her trials. Then the preacher spoke feelingly of busy husbands to be unappreciative, and his men got their word in season then. But, admitting that some really good men did not realize all their wives were to them, there was still the blessed privilege of service for the wife and the reward of the Master's approval. There was grace for this, and there was the promise of the Friend who could take the place of husband as well as father. When he came to the thought of motherhood the preacher's eyes grew misty and his voice trembled. Less than a year before he had laid away the one who had been the inspiration of his boyhood's days — the mother who had cared for him and led him to Christ by her own efforts. He thought, too, of the sweet woman in the minister's pew, and how many nights she had been up with sick children, and how many things she had sacrificed to be a good mother. Men seldom think of the patient mother of their own children when they are stirred to emotion on motherhood, but that day every man in the congregation