

The Fireside.

THE MINISTER OF THE DREAM.

A CHARACTER SKETCH.

The congregation of Marlton had been "hearing candidates" for eighteen months, and were tired of it. The ministers suffered accordingly, for the people were becoming very critical and hard to please.

As they passed up the plank sidewalk, one Sunday morning, the subject of conversation was, as usual, the preacher of the day.

"No good, no good at all," said Mrs. Jerrie, in her most determined manner.

"It was fine words he was using, but I couldn't follow his subject; his 'secondly' was too far away from his 'firstly.' But it was a grand text he had." The speaker was Mrs. Walker, an old widow, whose reputation for goodness was known far and near. As she was foremost in all church work her opinion of the latest candidate was always eagerly listened for, and carried more weight than did the opinion of all the deacons together.

On the present Sunday, therefore, the fate of this minister was decided by a few words of unfavorable criticism, and his name was placed on the rapidly increasing list of "might have beens."

After prayer meeting, the next Wednesday night, Mrs. Walker gathered a group of women together, and startled them by saying that she had seen the minister whom they should call. They crowded about her with exclamations, "Why, how did you see him? What's he like? Is he young and good-looking? Is he married?" These last, of course, by some of the younger ladies.

Mrs. Walker settled her bonnet ribbons evenly beneath her round, pleasant looking face, and drew her black shawl tightly across her shoulders. Then, lifting her broad, fat hand, as if to request attention, she began her story, "I had such a strange dream last night, I believe it was a vision. I thought I was sitting alone, when a door opened and a minister walked in. He said he had just been called to this congregation and was beginning his pastoral visits. Now, what do you think of that, ladies? I even noticed that he had a kind, soothing voice. He comforted me so much."

Here one of the girls interrupted with, "Do tell us what he looked like, Mrs. Walker?"

She laughed, "Why, all I remember about his looks was that he had black, curly hair, that stood out round his face, and very bright, brown eyes, which seemed to show every feeling and impression of his mind. And I told you about his voice—it was grand. I do hope he'll come soon."

One of the deacons had come up, while she was telling her story, and now asked in surprised tone, "Why, Mrs. Walker, you surely do not believe in dreams?"

It was no common dream, Mr. McKenzie, and when that minister comes, you may be sure he is the right one for us," Mrs. Walker calmly replied.

After some more discussion on ministers in general, they departed to their homes. Mrs. Walker's dream was laughed at and soon forgotten, except by a few of the more superstitious.

On Sunday the church was filled with those who had come to hear the last candidate that Presbytery would send them. As the congregation waited in a sultry quietness, which was broken only by the rustle of fans, and the swish of skirts of some latecomers, the vestry door opened and the minister walked in. He was tall and rather stout, with keen, brown eyes, and black, curly hair. He did not wear the customary gown, evidently because his Puritan soul disliked even the slightest formality. For a moment, he bowed his head on his clasped hands, then opened the service with prayer. His voice was very pleasant, and harmonious; his manner of speaking was interesting, and held the people's choicest attention to the end. He was at once recognized as the man of Mrs. Walker's dream. They liked his earnest sermon, and afterwards gathered around to tell him so. The next week, at a congregational meeting, Rev. Mr. Lawson, or, as the people called him, "The Minister of the Dream," was unanimously called to the pastorate of St. George's Church, Marlton.

Two months later Mrs. Walker died—not, however, before she had realized that the minister was one of real worth. She was fond of telling the people that, if it had not been for her dream, he might also have gone the way of the other candidates.

Mr. Lawson quickly showed a great love for his work, and a faculty for getting his parishioners interested in their own church duties. Not long after his induction, he discovered a section of his congregation so out of the way and poor, that the people could not come to the village church, and, consequently, had no religious services at all. Much to the dismay of the session, who feared he was working too hard, Mr. Lawson offered to give them a meeting once a week.

The only available place of meeting was the rough schoolhouse, situated far from any dwelling, on the top of a high hill. There were no trees near, and in winter the winds swept coldly about the building, piercing their way through the cracks in the walls and windows. Often, little drifts of snow crept in with the winds and coiled themselves up in front of Mr. Lawson as he preached. The seats were close together and very uncomfortable, yet they were always filled. One great difficulty which Mr. Lawson encountered here was the absence of a choir. Very often the minister himself was obliged to do all the preaching, praying and singing. If anyone else started the hymn, the congregation seemed to feel it their duty to vary the tune with notes and slurs of their own composition.

Despite all these hindrances, Mr. Lawson kept on visiting the little meetings held in the Mountain Schoolhouse, and much benefit resulted from his efforts. It did one good—even to see him on Sunday afternoons, as he went up and down the narrow aisle, shaking hands with everyone, and asking about the various members of the family. Now, he sent messages of cheer to the aged, no longer able to be present; again, he welcomed the children with a kind word, which they never forgot.

One little girl used to say, "I just love Mr. Lawson. I can understand

his sermons, and he always comes and speaks to me.

Nor was he any less happy in his visits among the people during the week. From house to house, he trudged his way through the congregation, and listened patiently to the secret troubles and petty trials of each family. He comforted and encouraged each one, guiding them to his Master, the Great Comforter; and, as he went on his way, they blessed him for what he had given them.

In winter, when the storms were hardest, and the drifts of snow highest, he was often seen shovelling his way to the houses of the poor in the neighborhood, and leaving at each door, with a merry word of advice and cheer, a well-filled basket of food.

"God bless you, Parson," said one man, as he took the basket, "we need the vituals bad enough, but more than that, you've given us something good to think and talk about all day."

It was when returning from one of these wearisome tramps that he was met at the Manse gate by a man from a remote part of his congregation.

"Solomon Hannaway's sick, Parson, he reckons he's going to die, and wants to see you pertickler." The wind was blowing the snow so roughly into his face that the words came in gasps.

"Solomon sick?" said the minister. "I am indeed sorry to hear that. Come inside and get warmed while I get ready to go with you."

Mr. Lawson's more matter-of-fact wife rebelled at "the idea of him driving through thirteen miles of snow-banked roads to see any man, specially Hannaway!" she added indignantly.

"He never came to the church when he was able, and, I'm sure, he never wanted to see a minister come near his house."

"You are too harsh, my dear," answered the minister, gently. "I have been watching these five years for an opportunity to help that man, and now I feel that since my chances has come, nothing on earth should prevent me from making the most of it. 'Besides,' he added, cheerily, as they left the door, "the snow isn't so deep in the woods, you know."

Yet in many places the banks were so high that the two men had to walk behind the easily-overturned sleigh, in the tracks the horse was making for them.

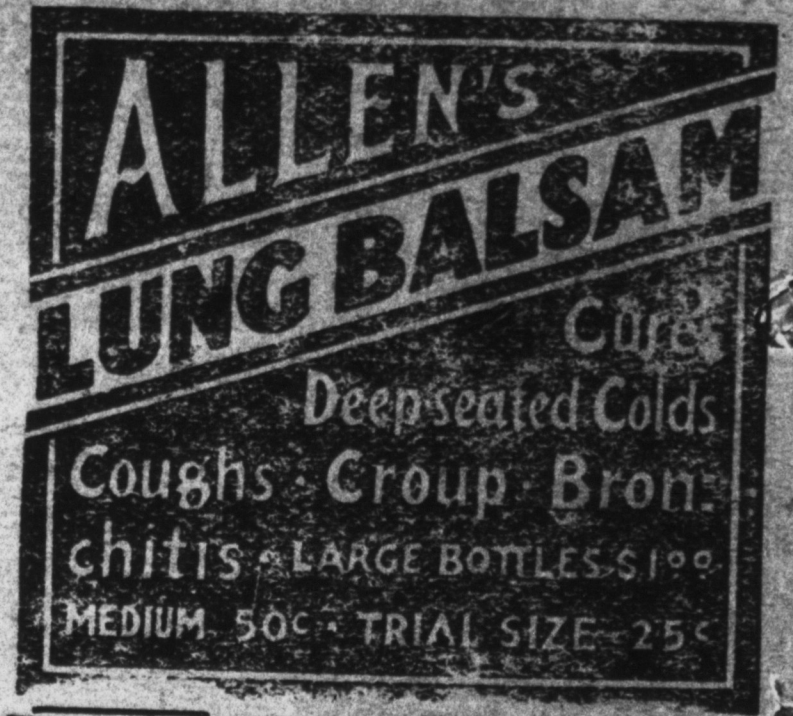
Once, his companion called above the noise of the crunching snow, "This is powerful hard on you, Parson. Reckon it be jest about as well to let ole Solomon die as he lived, 'thout any religion."

"No, no, John, you're wrong. And we'll hope that Solomon will get better and show us all what a good man he can be," answered the minister, and continued blowing on his fingers to keep them warm.

"Humph!" John siffered contemptuously, and drew a long breath, "well, here we are at the house. Hope ye ain't froze."

The Parson's predictions came true. Solomon recovered, and as a result of the talk on that stormy afternoon, he became a power for good in the community. Even Mrs. Lawson acknowledged that it was worth while driving thirteen miles on the bitterest winter day to effect such a transformation of character.

Mr. Lawson still lives among these people, to whom he has given the best and greatest part of his life. By precept and example, he has shown them the life worth living, the unselfish, joyous life, and they have come to regard



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BAD WITH WORMS.—Some time ago my little boy was very bad with worms. I procured a bottle of Dr. Low's Worm Syrup, and am thankful to say it cured him quickly and completely.—Mrs. C. Carleton, McKellar P. O., Ont.

Remember that if the opportunity for great deeds should never come, the opportunity for good deeds is renewed for you day by day. The thing for us to long for is the goodness, not the glory.—Frederick W. Farrar.

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