

Sunday

Reading.

The Deserted House.

With sagging door and staring window-places,
And sunken roof, it stands among its trees,
Befriended by the bushes that interpose
Between it and the light ghost-footed breeze.

Poor human nest, how desolately torn!
Yet in these ragged rooms young children slept;
And on this floor all broken and forlorn
The baby with the sunshine daily crept.

See where some older 'Tom' and 'Susie' stood,
And marked their names a yard space from the
ground;
That little height, when all of sweet and good
Within the narrow plot of home is found.

Such tiny sleeping rooms, with space for naught
Except a place to dress, a place to dream,
A book, a little shelf, a good right thought,
A childish treasure brought from field or stream.

Upon this curbstone, picking bit by bit
The grass that grew before the cottage door,
The six-months' baby sat examining it
As one who ne'er had seen its like before.

Here by the window in her willow chair,
The mother sewed and sang a low refrain,
Are those the patches from her piece bag there?
Nay, they are leaves that blew in with the rain.

The leaves blow in, the moss is on the roof,
The squirrels bring their treasures from the boughs,
The storm comes and with dull, unheating hoof,
Into this partial shelter stray the cows.

Ah, come away! Some wren's youth lies here,
Some man's fair childhood, dead but wondrous
sweet;
Some heart this cot has sheltered holds its dear,
And fills it with old loves and joys complete.

What right have we to pry or speculate?
The sun goes down, the darkness like a pall
Encloseth ruined house and porch and gate,
And tender darkness broodeth over all.

A Metropolitan Call.

By Rev. Chas. M. Sheldon.

Rev. John Warden had just opened a letter bearing the New York postmark. He had read only a few lines when he rose from his chair in great excitement and rushed downstairs to the kitchen, where his wife was cooking dinner.

'Sarah, what do you think of this?' he exclaimed. 'I have had a call! to the Marble Square Church, New York!'

The minister's wife was so astonished that she could not speak at first; then she said, 'It cannot be true, John! Surely you must be mistaken!'

'But here is the letter. Just listen to this, will you?'

The minister backed up against the kitchen table without noticing the flour he was rubbing off upon his coat. His wife listened in amazement to the letter:

The Rev. JOHN WARDEN, Fleming, Vt.

Dear Sir and Brother:—The Marble Square Church, at its regular meeting last Thursday night voted unanimously to extend you a call to become pastor of the church at a salary of six thousand dollars a year, and a parsonage on High Street Court. The church also granted you two months' vacation annually, the time to be chosen by you at your own convenience.

We trust that this section of the church, which was heartily unanimous, will meet with as hearty a response from you. We feel that we have made a wise choice, and we are sure the relations between us will be very cordial from the moment of your acceptance. An early answer will be regarded as a great favor. On behalf of the trustees and members of the Marble Square Church, I am,
Very truly your brother,
JAMES ROLAND, Clerk.

New York, January 15, 1899.

'Well, Sarah, what do you think of that? Did you ever suppose I should receive such a letter?'

'No, I never did. How do you suppose they came to give you such a call?'

'I am sure I do not know,' the minister answered, modestly.

'Perhaps those strangers who were at church three weeks ago—'

The minister's wife paused, then continued excitedly.

'Yes! You remember, John, those three men who stayed at the hotel that Sunday you preached the sermon on Power? It was an unusually good sermon. Those strangers must have been a committee from the Marble Square Church, and they have reported favorably, giving you a call without waiting for you to preach first in New York.'

'Do you think I ought to accept the call?' asked the Rev. John Warden, thoughtfully.

'Of course! The minister's wife spoke with great decision. 'Won't it be splendid to live in New York after all these years in this little town? O John, think of it! Six thousand dollars a year and a parsonage! More than six times as much as you are getting now! Won't it be grand?'

'It will be hard to leave Fleming though!'

The minister sighed. 'We have been here now nearly fifteen years, and I have come to love the people very much.'

'Still, I don't think they have appreciated your preaching, John,' said the minister's wife, energetically, as she opened the stove door and took out a pie. 'The New York people have discovered you.'

He talked over the remarkable event a little longer with his wife, and then went up-stairs into his study, but he was too excited to work on his sermon, and he went out and took a walk.

THE MOTHER

with a nursing baby has two lives to support. Her flesh, strength and vitality are taxed to the utmost, and must be maintained or both will surely fail.

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The letter burned in his pocket, and obeying a sudden impulse, he stepped into Deacon Sayles's as he passed down the main street.

The deacon was at home, and the minister showed him the letter.

The deacon read it slowly, not understanding it at first what it all meant. When he reached the end, however, he looked over his spectacle and said, quietly 'So you are going to leave us, parson?'

The Rev. John Warden felt a little embarrassed.

'I have talked it over with my wife. Yes I suppose I shall accept. I wanted to see you and Deacon Binney and bring the matter before the church before deciding positively.'

'I'd accept if I was you,' said the deacon. 'You won't have another call like that very soon. We shall miss you though. Let's see. How long have you been with us?'

'Fifteen years this coming Christmas,' replied the minister, thoughtfully.

'Yes, yes. A long pastorate, as pastorates go nowadays. Well, we shall not know what to do when you are gone.'

The minister went home feeling somewhat depressed; and he was surprised, also, for he had never heard Deacon Sayles express so much feeling during the fifteen years he had known him.

He decided to accept the call; but first it was necessary to bring the matter before the church. The regular weekly meeting came on Wednesday night. There was a very large attendance, for rumors of the call had already reached Fleming people.

The letter was read and the minister made a few remarks at the close of the meeting. He was much affected, and Deacon Binney, who had the reputation of being one of the hardest-headed farmers in the township sat with head erect, the tears rolling over his weather-beaten face.

When the Rev. John Warden reached home that night, after a very affecting scene which followed the meeting, he was almost minded to refuse the call. However, the next morning he wrote a letter in which he accepted the pastorate of the Marble Square Church. The letter was mailed, and the minister then began a sermon in which he gave his reasons for making a change, closing with his formal resignation. This was to be read Sunday morning.

Meanwhile, Fleming village and parish was greatly stirred over the minister's metropolitan call. 'I tell you what!' said old Jake Bowers, the village blacksmith, as he leaned against his anvil and a group of listeners stood around. 'We are going to lose a mighty good man out of this parish. Last Sunday's sermon was a powerful one, I reckon. I noticed, I said to myself when the service was over, 'That kind of preaching will lose us our minister if the city folks once hears him.'

'Jake must have dreamed that he said it,' drawled out Bill Covill, the miller's assistant, 'because he was asleep all through the sermon last Sunday.'

'Asleep yourself!' retorted Jake, who, however, turned very red in the face as he blew up his forge.

'All the same, it's a great loss to all Fleming parish,' said Judge Howard, thoughtfully. 'I don't know how we are going to get along without the parson. He certainly is a master preacher. The wonder to me is that the city folks have not found it out before this.'

Seems kind o' queer his church-members haven't been more regular in their attendance on such fine preaching,' said Job Wilbur, who was not a member himself, and posed as a skeptic for the village.

'How often have you heard him?' asked the judge, sharply.

'Oh, I've been to church once a year, and on funeral occasions,' replied Job, carelessly.

'The parson will make a stir in New York, I reckon,' said Abe Lyons. And

then the talk went on in praise of the parson, and regret at his leaving the parish.

At Deacon Binney's, the family was discussing the same general topic of conversation, when Deacon Sayles came in.

'Well, neighbor, this is a blow to Fleming parish, isn't it? New York must want our minister pretty bad. It seems they sent up three men as a committee to listen three Sundays ago, and now comes this call. Well! well! I never really thought we had been listening to such great talent for years.'

'Hadm't you? I've been more than suspicious myself for some time. Fact is, Deacon Sayles, we've been sitting under the best preaching for years and haven't appreciated it.'

'Of course we can't give six thousand dollars a year and parsonage,' said Deacon Sayles, a little gloomily.

'Of course not. It's a great pity, though, that we never offered to raise the salary. We might have kept him from getting discontented.'

Deacon Sayles shook his head, but after agreeing that the parish has not appreciated its minister as it should, he went on to the next neighbor's to talk over the news.

That was a very trying week for the Rev. John Warden. When he went out to make his afternoon calls he was astonished at the feeling expressed. Old Sallie Barnes who was an invalid, with inflammatory rheumatism, and who always wanted to know, when he called, why he had not come a week sooner, broke down and cried like a child when he went in to see her this time.

'Oh dear! Oh dear!' she moaned, rocking back and forth in her old chair. 'I shall die if you go away! I know I shall! And I never can get used to any one else! No one knows my troubles as you do!'

When he went away she refused to be comforted, and he left the poor old woman sobbing and groaning in a pitiful manner.

As he moved on up the village street, people who for years had not said anything more than 'good morning' surprised him by coming out of their shops and houses to shake his hand and express regret at his departure.

Then he had a very sick parishioner to visit out on the hills. He drove out and found him in a critical condition. The family had not heard of the minister's metropolitan call, and when he told them, they all surrounded him, in tears and with clasped hands, and one of the children climbed into his lap and said, 'Who will come to see father when you are gone? It was a very painful experience for him, and when he drove back to the village he was very much depressed, and somehow could not rally his spirits, even when he thought of the six thousands dollars and the parsonage on High Street Court, and the great church and its pipe-organ and fashionable quartet choir.

So matters went on until Saturday night. The minister never had known that his parish cared so much for him. Even Job Wilbur expressed his sorrow at the parson's departure, and said something rather hurriedly about ministers being necessary to a community. Old Uncle Peters, who had not spoken to him for a long time because of something he had once said in a sermon about tobacco-using came and asked him to forgive his taking offence, and promised to be out to church on the coming Sunday. The people of the parish were already planning a farewell reception, and the whole village was evidently stirred to its depths by his acceptance of the call.

'My dear,' said the minister to his wife, when Saturday night came, 'I never knew how much the church and parish cared for us. It is a revelation. I am almost of a mind to reconsider my acceptance of the New York call.'

'That would be very foolish,' replied his wife. 'It is true the people love you very much. It is a great pity they have not shown it oftener.'

'We are all liable to that fault,' the minister sighed as he said it. 'We do not show our love to our dearest friends, and too often wait until they are dead before we tell them how much we love them.'

This was Saturday night. The morning sermon, in which the minister had given his reasons for seeking a wider field, lay on his desk, together with his resignation as pastor of Fleming church.

'I think I will go up to the post-office and get the mail,' said the minister to his wife, as he heard the evening train come in. Generally he waited until Monday morning, but he felt restless and uneasy, and went out.

When he came back, he had an open letter in his hand, and his face was pale and wore an expression that would be difficult to describe.

'John!' cried his wife, as he came into the centre of the room, nearer the light on the table. 'What is the matter?'

'I have another letter from New York,'



Two questions

with common-sense answers. "How long should a man's legs be," somebody asked Abraham Lincoln, and he said, "Long enough to reach from his body to the ground."

"How can you take housework so easy," somebody asked a bright little woman. "By not working so hard," she said. "By doing all my washing and cleaning with Pearlina."



said the minister, with a feeble smile. 'Let me read it to you.'

He was not so excited as before, but his voice trembled a little as he read:

REV. JOHN WARDEN, Fleming, Vt.

Dear Sir and Brother: I hasten to correct a most embarrassing and distressful blunder on my part in reference to a letter directed to you by mistake, and answered by you in good faith. The call of the Marble Square Church which was sent to you was intended for the brother who bears your name, even to the same initials, and who lives in the town of Fleming, but in another state. My great blunder consisted in carelessly writing the name of your state instead of his. I trust that you will pardon this most unfortunate error. I am very much chagrined that so grave a mistake has been made, and hope your plans will not be too seriously disturbed by this necessary correction of my carelessness. With very much regret, I am, my dear sir, yours truly,
JAMES ROLAND,
Clerk of Marble Square Church, New York.
January 21, 1899.

For several moments neither the minister nor his wife said a word. Then the minister said quietly:

'Then it seems those three strangers were—'

'Yes, they were commercial travellers, evidently!' exclaimed his wife. 'O John! What will you do now?'

'I shall have to preach without notes to-morrow,' he answered with a smile.

But the minister's wife, to tell the truth, sat down and had a good cry. Then she recovered her equanimity, and consoled her husband and made the best of it.

When Sunday morning came and the minister went into his pulpit, he faced the largest audience he had ever seen in Fleming church. All his members were out, all the people who, for one reason or another, had not been to church for years, several families from the adjoining township, and, most conspicuous of all, Job Wilbur, in his best clothes, sat in the front row of the gallery, the sneer on his face almost gone.

The Rev. John Warden must have preached a little better than usual. His heart was warm with the love of his people, and he had had time to recover from his first disappointment. He preached on the fellowship of the saints. And as the people did not yet know the news of the mistake in the call, they were attentive up to the last moment of the sermon. As he finished a movement of expectation went over the audience.

The people, of course, expected him to read his resignation as a formal act, necessitated by his previous acceptance of the call to the Marble Square Church. He had already decided on his course, and without hesitation he said:

'Friends, I have a communication to read to you. As you all know, I have received and accepted a call to the Marble Square Church in New York. It is now necessary for me to read the following, in order that you may know the reason for my doing as I do.'

Accordingly he opened and read the letter from the clerk which he had received the night before. The Rev. John Warden will never forget the look that swept over the people as he finished reading. If it had not been Sunday and in church, Jake Bowers afterward said, he would have led off with three cheers. As it was almost every one broke down and cried. Deacon Sayles blew his nose, and Deacon Binney wiped his bald head nervously with the cover of a hymn book. And when the service was over, no one ever saw such a handshaking in Fleming church.

The people gave the reception to the minister, after all. They said there had not been enough sociability in the church for a long time. The Rev. John Warden seemed to grow young again, and found some new texts for his sermons. His wife feels a little regret as time goes on, but it seems as if the people could not do enough to show their love for them both.

'After all, I can always say that I once had a call to a metropolitan pulpit,' he says to his wife when she thinks his sermons are not appreciated; and as the parish of Fleming grows dearer to him the longer he knows it and loves it, he can speak without regret and with actual amusement of his famous metropolitan call.

It was not Superstition.

In connection with the stories of sudden death or paralysis after gross blasphemy, it is proper to recognize the apoplectic effect of vehement passion. But no matter whether such incidents are the result

of natural or supernatural causes, it is at least sure that one's moral nature is deadened and weakened even though no physical hurt follows when one grossly mocks the Holiest Name known to human faith.

We remember reading in an old book of 'Catechism Anecdotes' about a number of reckless persons who organized themselves into a 'Bible Burners' Club.' At their first meeting, after a series of burlesque solemnities, the 'high priest' approached the fire with a bible in his hand, intending to commit it to the flames, but at that moment he suddenly turned pale and laid it down, saying: 'We'll not burn this one till we get a better one.'

However unconfessed one's belief in God may be, any situation that forces Him up on the thoughts and sensibilities like an actual Presence will make impiety less reckless and inconsiderate.

'Would you talk like that if God were here, and you could see Him as plainly as you see me?' said a minister to a young man whom he had surprised in a paroxysm of profanity.

'Well, sir,' retorted the swearer, defiantly, 'if you mean to imply that I am a coward—'

'No,' said the minister, 'I mean nothing of the sort. And it is because you undoubtedly possess courage that I am going to make to you an unusual proposition. If you will stand alone in the churchyard to-night, at twelve o'clock, and repeat aloud the oaths you have just uttered, I will pay you a sum equal to your week's wages.'

The young man demurred at 'stooping,' as he said, 'to such a silly whim,' but finally confessed that he was very much in need of money, and was, therefore willing to 'earn it easy.'

'But how will you know I have kept my promise?' he asked.

'I shall trust your honor, sir,' replied the minister.

The young man went to the cemetery at midnight. His thoughts during his walk there, and in the silence among the 'pillared marbles,' can only be guessed. His mother's grave was there, and he had not visited it for years. A natural feeling led him to the spot. He heard the steeple-clock strike twelve, but he did not open his lips. It struck one; it struck two; it struck three before he went away. He could not utter profane words beside his mother's grave. Dared he utter them to his living Maker?

The next day, when the minister offered him the promised money, he said, 'No. I have not earned it. The job was too much for me.' But the effect of the night's experience was such that swearing became obnoxious to him.

There was no 'superstition' in this. The incident shows merely that the rebuking effect of a solemn circumstance will sometimes expose one's wickedness to one's self when nothing else can. More than this, human experience has often declared that in a sacred association something divine seems to speak, something that is above conscience itself.

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'Father,' said the boy who has been encouraged to ask questions, 'what does the word "credulity" mean?'

'Credulity,' was the answer, 'means the ability to go right ahead believing the weather reports.'