

## \* \* The Story Page \* \*

### Mr. Pixey's Predecessor.

BY LEANDER S. KEYSER.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Mrs. Climax.

"Oh! he's 'fairly well to middling,' as my old grandfather used to say," replied Mr. Climax. "But then"—and the speaker made a significant pause—"he's not Mr. Heritage."

"We'll never have such another minister as Mr. Heritage was, I'm afraid," observed Mrs. Climax, with a dubious shake of her head. "He was a model man and a good preacher."

"Yes, there are few like him. I doubt whether the new minister will fill the bill," and Mr. Climax turned to his Sunday magazine.

The Rev. Mr. Pixey had spent two Sundays in his new pastorate. They had been trying Sundays, and he felt, after they were over, that he had scarcely done credit to himself or the great themes that he had sought to discuss. The Madison street church, as it was locally called, was not an easy congregation to serve, for the people were disposed to be a little critical, and therefore hard to please.

But the worst difficulty was Mr. Pixey's predecessor. "In what way was he an obstacle?" you ask. Well, he had been extremely successful, combining those pulpit and pastoral qualities that are rarely found in the ministry. Affable and sincere in his social relations with his people, he had also been able to edify and delight his auditors whenever he went into the pulpit.

Now, who does not know that it is more difficult to follow a pastor who has been a success than one who has been a failure? In the former case there will always be invidious comparisons which will sting the present incumbent, unless he is a man of an extremely happy disposition.

It must be said that Mr. Pixey's temperament was not the kind that is best adapted to meet every emergency. Wherever he went in his pastoral visitation he heard the praises of his predecessor rung. It was Mr. Heritage here, and Mr. Heritage there. Mr. Heritage had done this, and Mr. Heritage had done that, and Mr. Heritage had never said this or that. When Pastor Pixey reached home after a round with his parishioners, his ears fairly tingled with the name of Mr. Heritage. Even some people who had not cared a great deal for Mr. Heritage while he was their pastor had now, since "distance lent enchantment to the view," enthroned him in their memories as little less than a saint, or even an angel.

"One would almost think that there had never been such another man as Mr. Heritage, to hear these people sounding his praises," Mr. Pixey remarked to his wife one evening after he had returned from his pastoral calls.

"It's a little ungracious for them to talk so to you, don't you think it is?" she replied. "They might have a little consideration for your feelings."

"I think I shall tell some of them so, too," Mr. Pixey declared, with a little more sentiment than it was proper for a Christian man to feel.

No matter what position a man occupies, it is not always easy to exorcise the demon of envy from his heart; and Mr. Pixey could not help it—he felt jealous of his popular predecessor. The next afternoon he gave vent to his feelings in several of his pastoral calls.

"All of us thought so much of Mr. Heritage," said Mrs. Homer, at whose home the new minister had called. "He was a model pastor; he sympathized with everybody in joy and sorrow, and he preached such helpful sermons."

During this eulogium Mr. Pixey's face darkened. Mrs. Homer noticed the change in his look, and brought her laudation of Mr. Heritage to an abrupt conclusion.

"No man is an angel, Mrs. Homer," said the pastor, and I suppose Mr. Heritage had his faults in common with the rest of us."

"He may have had his faults, but they were very few and inconspicuous," retorted Mrs. Homer, her face flushing.

"Well, any way, he has gone," Mr. Pixey pursued, "and I think the people should cease talking so much about him, and—and—well, in short, transfer their allegiance to—the new pastor, and devote themselves to the new order of things."

The speaker could not have employed unwise tactics. Mrs. Homer made no reply, but her manner became cold and constrained, and after her visitor had gone she stepped over to her neighbor and expressed her opinion of the new pastor in unequivocal terms.

"I don't feel that I care to go to the church any more," she declared, indignantly. "Mr. Pixey made a fling at Mr. Heritage. He hinted that perhaps he wasn't an angel after all just as if we had put him up on a pedestal. Then he thought we ought to forget Mr. Heritage and transfer our affections to him, that is, to Mr. Pixey!"

"Did he say that?" questioned Mrs. Molesworth.

"Well, I never! He's jealous, so he is. Well, I don't care to listen to any man who disparages Mr. Heritage, who was our best friend and sympathizer in all our troubles, and you know we've had our share of them during the last few years."

"Yes, indeed, and I can say the same. No one who wants to be my friend will dare to say anything unkind about my old pastor."

The two women expressed their opinions to others, and so the difficulty spread. Meanwhile Mr. Pixey was going on in his mistaken course. During the afternoon he revealed his resentment toward his predecessor in the presence of half a dozen of his parishioners, and in one case found himself actually in an angry dispute.

"I won't let any one cast a reflection upon Mr. Heritage in my presence," said Mr. Moore, hotly, after listening to Mr. Pixey's insinuating remarks. "When I spoke well of him a minute ago I didn't mean to deprecate you; but if you can't bear to hear him mentioned it's a great pity for you; that's all I've got to say!"

If ever a minister had what is proverbially known as the "blues," that minister was Rev. Mr. Pixey that evening on his return to the parsonage. He was not naturally ill-grained, and he had the cause of Christ really at heart, but that little imp of envy had, for the time got his feelings in its grip. He felt vaguely that he had made a mistake in trying as he had to bring about a transfer of the people's affections to himself, but his bitter feelings clouded his judgment and made him somewhat restless of consequences. Little sleep visited his pillow that night; and whenever he did drop off into a doze he was compelled to wrestle with the nightmare of envy.

The next morning he had scarcely settled down to his books in his study when there was a ring at his door-bell.

"Why, it is Mr. Tomlinson," he exclaimed, as he opened the door. "Come in."

"Will you excuse me for interrupting your morning's work for a little while?" asked the visitor, taking the proffered chair. "I came on a special errand."

It must be said here that Mr. Tomlinson was one of the leading members of the Madison street church, a man of rare devotion, of sound judgment, of excellent spirit and a kind of Aaron and Hur combined, to the pastor, whoever he was. He soon introduced the object of his visit.

"Bro. Pixey," he began, "your sermons have done me a great deal of good. I am glad to tell you this. They were filled with the spirit of the Gospel, and were pleasantly and forcibly delivered. I feel sure that our people will appreciate your efforts."

"Perhaps they might if they weren't so wedded to—Mr. Heritage," interrupted the pastor. "But they won't forget him;" and there was a little of acerbity in Mr. Pixey's tones.

"Well, Bro. Pixey, that introduces the subject on which I want to have a frank talk with you," said Mr. Tomlinson kindly. "Having lived here many years, I think I know the people well—better than you can know them in only a few weeks' acquaintance. Let me speak of your predecessor. He was our pastor for almost nine years, and he possessed qualities that endeared him to the people. Of course they can't forget him."

"No, I should think not!" laughed Mr. Pixey, bitterly.

"Now, Bro. Pixey, let me ask you this question: What would you think of our people if, after Mr. Heritage had served them faithfully and lovingly for so many years, they should forget him in a few weeks?" Wouldn't you think them fickle?"

"Well—I—never thought of it in that way," the pastor confessed.

"Do you really want them to forget Mr. Heritage? Suppose you should serve them as long as he did, and should become endeared to them, would you want to be forgotten in a few weeks?"

"Why—no—I should not."

"Haven't you many loyal friends in the charge you have just left?"

"Yes, indeed, hundreds of them."

"Isn't it pleasant to think they are still your friends, and speak well of you to others, perhaps to your successor?"

"Of-course it is, Bro. Tomlinson."

"Besides, the people's continued loyalty to Mr. Heritage proves their stability, does it not? And stability is a splendid virtue in the members of a congregation. After you have won their hearts by faithful and unselfish service, they will cling to you just as loyally as they now cling to Mr. Heritage. Don't you see?"

"Thank you, Bro. Tomlinson. You are throwing new light upon the situation."

"Again," resumed the wise counsellor, "you need not think that praise of Mr. Heritage meant disparagement of you. True, some comparisons will be made, but you

must bear them good-naturedly, and must not take them to heart. Do not get the idea that you and Mr. Heritage are rivals in the affections of your people. They can love you both. There is room enough in their hearts for you and your predecessor. Love is not a quantity that must be parceled out to various persons, giving some much and others little. Let me say candidly that I have a warm affection for Mr. Heritage, but I love you, my present pastor, none the less. There is no competition in true Christian love."

"You are quite a moralizer," admitted the pastor.

"May I give you a word of counsel?"

"Certainly, Bro. Tomlinson."

"It is this: As you go about among your people join in their praises of Mr. Heritage. Second them heartily. You can do this in sincerity. I am sure, for no one can deny that he did a grand work here. If you show appreciation of him you will find that his friends will become your friends. In that way you can make his popularity a means or advancing the interests of the church and of Christ. On the other hand, if you should pass any criticism on Mr. Heritage, you will only alienate his friends and admirers from yourself."

"Bro. Tomlinson, you have heard something," broke out the pastor.

"Yes, I have; I must be frank with you; and I came at the first appearance of a little cloud of trouble in the horizon. I know you will understand my motive in coming to you."

"Indeed, I thank you very sincerely. I cannot tell you how grateful I am. Your talk has been an eye-opener to me. I shall spend the afternoon in rectifying the sad blunders of yesterday. God bless you. Good-day, sir. Always be frank with me as you have been to-day."

When the door had closed on his visitor the pastor dropped on his knees and offered a fervent prayer for the expulsion of the demon of envy from his heart. His prayer was answered.

It remains only to be said that Mr. Pixey had a long and successful pastorate with the Madison street church, and when it came to a close and he moved elsewhere, he had many friends and admirers who greatly regretted his departure.—W. Recorder.

### \* \* The Measure of Responsibility. \* \*

BY IDA REED SMITH.

Ward Hemenway opened the hall door with his latch-key and passed from the dark and rainy night without into the light and warmth of his home. Setting his dripping umbrella in the tall Japanese holder, he took off his damp overcoat and hat and then made his way to the family sitting-room. His mother looked up from her sewing, a little surprise visible upon her face.

"Didn't you go to the business meeting, after all?" she asked.

Ward threw himself into a capacious rocking chair and stretched his wet feet toward the fire that blazed cheerily in the grate.

"Oh, yes," said he, "I went, but it didn't last long tonight."

"I thought you were to elect officers," said Mrs. Hemenway, "and usually that takes up considerable time."

Ward laughed, a short, sarcastic laugh, which made his mother look at him closely. After a few moments' silence she said gently:

"What was the trouble, dear?"

"Oh, we struck the usual snag," was the reply, "only this time we couldn't seem to pull away from it. Couldn't find anybody willing to be president, so the meeting is adjourned for one week. Then we'll meet again and go through the same performance, probably."

"Couldn't find a president among all the young people of your society?" questioned Mrs. Hemenway: "that's rather strange isn't it? Whom did you nominate?"

"Why—ah—well, first they nominated me. But of course I didn't accept."

"Why not?"

"Oh—well—because I couldn't think of being president. Of course I'm interested and willing to work just as hard as anybody else, but I don't want to assume the responsibility of an office."

"Oh!" Mrs. Hemenway smiled as she basted down a hem with swift, even stitches. That afternoon she had attended a meeting of ladies, called to elect officers and plan the work of a literary club for a year, and Ward's excuses fell upon her ears with a very familiar sound. However, she passed the circumstance by without comment, and said:

"Well, who came next?"

"Flora Hollister was the next fortunate, but refused because she's going away for the summer. Lewis Barron couldn't take it because he's already teaching in the