

weeks. He was the village doctor, a middle-aged man, who had always led an irreligious life. Mr. Ralston had tried to talk with him often, but he looked on all Christians as hypocrites, and said he knew they were.

However, this morning, his mother came, asking the minister to go at once, as her son wanted to see him. Glad of the opportunity, Mr. Ralston put his Bible into his pocket and started at once. On the way, the doctor's mother told him how her son was terribly distressed about his relation to his God. Arrived at the house, the minister was startled to see how great a change had come over the doctor since he saw him last. Poor man. At the last moment he began to seek for the light he had despised all his life. After a passage of Scripture had been read, and a prayer offered, the sick man prayed himself. What a prayer it was! How intense! How awful in its intensity! As never before Ralston saw what good news the message of Jesus was. Yet men despised it, and even the church seemed to have lost the real gospel. As he went away from the dying physician's home, the minister of Sargon determined to awake his church.

He had a sermon partly prepared for next Sabbath, but he began anew. He took for his text 'The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.' With all the burning zeal of a Baxter he preached 'as a dying man to dying men.' He called on the people to repent of sin. He boldly denounced the sins of the community. He preached the coming judgment, and then in glowing terms appealed to them to receive the gospel anew and live for God.

At first the congregation listened complacently, but as the burning words of the earnest preacher showed that he was in downright earnest, a strange feeling ran through the audience. Sargon was surprised. No minister had ever preached to them like that before. Sargon was angry. What right had this man to speak to them such a message of authority. They had 'hired' him to preach for them, not to denounce their sins.

At the conclusion of the services the majority of them shook his hand coldly at the door. A few (oh, how few) gave him a look of gratitude, as they pressed his hand, and he noticed a tear in their eyes. He felt his sermon was not altogether in vain.

Next morning the senior deacon called at the parsonage. After a few commonplace remarks he began: 'Mr. Ralston, your sermon yesterday has displeased some of our best members.' 'I am sorry to hear it,' he replied, 'I only preached the gospel.' 'Well,' said the deacon shortly, 'that sort of preaching won't do here,' and he gruffly took his departure.

That very morning Ralston received an earnest invitation from a friend to visit him and stay over the Sabbath. He decided to go, and at prayer-meeting (which was smaller even than usual) he announced he would be away the next Sabbath. The journey soothed him, and once Sargon was out of his mind, his spirits rose. His visit was a real tonic, and when asked to preach that Sabbath in the church which his friend attended, he preached with a freedom and joy that was new to him in the pulpit. The next week he returned to Sargon.

Chapter IV.—A New Field.

For some unaccountable reason, as the pastor of Sargon stepped off the train on his return from his visit, his spirits sank. As far as the work was concerned in that place, he seemed to have lost all ambition. He could not at first understand it himself, for he was no coward. It made no real difference to him whether Sargon was a difficult field or not. He wanted a place in the front line of battle. But as he contrasted his feelings when at his friend's church with his feelings in Sargon, slowly the truth dawned upon him.

The reason why his work was powerless and dispiriting in Sargon was—not that sin had more power there than elsewhere—but because the church at Sargon was at heart apostate. He went over his members one by one, and at last he was compelled to confess that the truly regenerated among them were so inconsiderable that the whole church was nothing but a sham. He felt that if he wanted to do anything for God's kingdom in Sargon he must have (to begin with) some foundation, and his church there was a false foundation. It was not real. The deep, far-reaching life-controlling spiritual truths of the gospel were utterly unknown to the great majority of the members. That was why they did not understand him or appreciate Bible truths. And he saw clearly that this unregenerated church was an insurmountable barrier between himself and the world outside the church, which he utterly failed to reach.

Having come to these conclusions, Ralston at once formed his resolution. He knew that if he ever did any real good in Sargon he must first destroy the existing church organization, and reorganize it on a true basis. But this he felt altogether both unqualified and unable to do. There was but one manly course for him—to resign his ministry at Sargon—and this he resolutely determined to do.

He was in his study, and calling his wife he told her the situation. She listened intently, for she loved and honored her husband, but when he spoke of leaving Sargon so soon, tears came into her eyes. She had just got the parsonage beautifully arranged. Everything was so comfortable. Where would they go? 'Alfred,' she said at last, 'I never expected this. You are right, I know, but what can we do?'

The young pastor paused. He had not thought of this. He some way had left all such things out of account. Their parsonage was a lovely home with beautifully shaded grounds. It was cruel to ask his girl-wife to tear up everything and move, just as she felt settled. He began to waver, but he remembered Christ's words: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.' He took his wife's hand, and looking into her eyes, said: 'Esther, dear, trust me. God will provide.' She wiped away her tears, kissed him, and went down to her work. In a little while he heard her singing softly:

'All for Jesus I surrender, I surrender all.'

From that hour Alfred Ralston had a new feeling of devotion and love for his wife. He never forgot her beautiful act of self-sacrifice.

Just a few days later he received a let-

ter from the friend he had visited. It told him that the pastor of the church there had been called to another place and the people every one wanted Alfred Ralston as their pastor. He was overwhelmed. His friend had told him what a true church it was. He remembered his experience there. All was settled and in a short time the change was made.

Sargon was surly when Mr. Ralston left, but his way was plain, and now he joyfully and successfully ministers among a true people who know God and love his word.

The Everlasting Collection.

('Morning Star.')

The following extract from the 'Missionsblatt' for September, 1901, is dedicated to the dear brethren who are always finding fault with the frequent calls that are made for money to sustain the missionary enterprises of the church.

In a circle of earnest Christian men the conversation turned to 'the everlasting collection.' One remarked: 'It has become intolerable these last years; formerly it was not so.' 'You are right, formerly it was different,' answered the oldest of the party. 'Yes,' continued the first speaker, 'don't you think there is a risk of bending the bow too far?' With flashing eye the old man looked round and said in reply: 'I can only say that we ought to get down on our knees and thank God for the many collections. From time to time I cross the churchyard and walk past the long rows of the departed. No one there begs from me or makes any appeal. No, the dead don't prefer any requests. Thereafter I come to the village, to the living. At the laborer's humble cottage the mother has just arrived with a basket of provisions. How delighted are the youngsters! 'Mother, is it dinner time?' 'A roll to me!' 'And one to me!' they shouted. And one small fellow creeps on all fours and holds out his hand for something. The sore-tormented mother seemed rather to rejoice in the healthy appetites of her children, and hands to each its portion with gladness on her face.' 'Now then for the application of your tale,' asked one of the gentlemen. 'It is obvious,' continued the speaker. 'It is true that formerly there were fewer collections. I remember those days well, the days of cold rationalism. We then went round about among the churches as among the graves and the dead. There were no collections in them, for there was no life there. There was no stretching forth of the helping hand. Do you want those days back? Nowadays it is different,—collection after collection. Is it a bad sign? No, no! God has breathed life into the dry bones, and quickened a sense of the thousand-fold needs of the church. Now there is begging and the clamor of appeals on all sides. The hungry children cry to the mother for bread. Now there is life, a life that awakens hunger and thirst, a life quickened by God. Therefore ought we to thank him on bended knee for "the everlasting collection."'

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