

## The Revival of a Missionary.

BY IAN MACLAREN.

It was not that the minister had become too old, for he was still in the prime of life; or that his health had failed, for he was stronger than in the days of his youth; or that he had ceased to study, for he was a harder reader than ever; or that he had lost touch with the age, for he was essentially a modern thinker. It was not that he was less diligent in pastoral work or less skilful in organization, nor was it that he had quarrelled with his congregation, or his congregation with him, nor was it that the district had changed or that the church had been left without people. He preached as well as ever he did, and with much more weight and wisdom than twenty years ago. There were as many members on the roll, and as much money raised, and as much work done, and the church had as great a reputation. It was difficult to lay your finger upon anything wanting in minister or people, and yet the minister was conscious and the people had a vague sense that something was wrong. The spirit of the congregation was lower, their discharge of duty was flatter, their response to appeals was slower, their attendance at extra services was poorer. There was less enthusiasm, less spontaneity, less loyalty. After fifteen years of service in the same place, addressing the same people, and saying, of necessity, the same things, and moving about in the same district, the minister, without any fault on his part, but simply through an infirmity of human nature, had grown a little weary. He had lost freshness, not of thought nor of expression, but of spirit; and there was not in him now that buoyancy of soul and that hopefulness of tone and that perpetual joy of speech which had once attracted people and won their hearts. And, on their part, the people had lost freshness, as it were, toward him; not respect for him nor gratitude for his past service nor appreciation of his present work, but their sense of expectation from him and their affectionate delight in him and their joy in speaking about him. Their pulses were not stirred when he preached, nor did a visit from him make an event, nor would his absence make any great blank in their lives. There was still an honest affection between the minister and his people, but it had lost the passion and romance of past years. It was now undemonstrative and well regulated; perhaps a trifle too sober and calm to be called affection.

The people had grown so accustomed to their minister, his appearance, his voice, his way of thinking, his tricks of manner, that they were able to criticise him and note his faults with much accuracy. He did not care to be contradicted, and was apt to be puffed when his plans were opposed; he was too fond of certain lines of thought, and did not always preach to edification; he was apt to be too much with a few friends, and did not hold himself sufficiently at the disposal of all; he gave too much attention to outside work, and sometimes neglected his pastoral duty; he insisted upon using his leisure time as he pleased, and did not seem to remember that he ought not to have any leisure time; he was apt to grumble when extra duties were put upon him, and was not always gracious when asked to do more than his own work. Ten years ago no one had dared to hint at those faults, for he would have been torn in pieces by his fellow-members, as an evil-minded and unreasonable man. The minister was very much then what he is now, but his faults then were high spirits and earnestness and kindly feeling and devotion to spiritual duty. He was perfect then in the glamour of the morning light; he is an ordinary man now whose imperfections are clearly seen in the glare of noonday. The minister is also able now to look at his people from a distance and to judge them with an impartial mind, while once they were to him altogether lovely, without spot or blemish or any such thing, and you might have more safely criticised a bride's appearance to her bridegroom during the honeymoon than have found fault with the man's congregation. Whether it be that his eyes are clearer or his heart is colder, he is under no delusions now; and although he would not say such things in public, he knows quite well wherein his people come short. Some of them are hopelessly bigoted in their own views, and are not open even to the best light, which he is apt to think is his own. Some of them are so liberal that they have hardly any faith, and he forgets to remind himself that for their lack of faith he is responsible. Some of them are so worldly that the highest appeals of religion have no effect upon their lives, and some of them so ungenerous that they will hardly support the best of causes. He feels keenly that young people whom he trained and loved are no longer true to him, but prefer other voices, and are as enthusiastic about others as once they were about him; and he misses little acts of kindness, which are no longer rendered him, and which he valued, not for their own value, but because they were the sacraments of friendship. He still believes his congregation to be better than any other he knows, he still remembers their loyalty in years past; but the days of first love are over, and his heart is sometimes heavy.

One evening the office-bearers of the church had been meeting, and when the business was done they drifted

into talk about the church life and about their minister. They were, upon the whole, a body of honorable, sensible, good-hearted, and straightforward men, who desired to do their best by their minister, and not to vex him in any way; who always took care that he had a proper salary and a good holiday; who would never complain without reason, and who would never dream of asking any man to resign, and setting him adrift after a long service without a pension. But they were not satisfied with the state of affairs, and after much talking up and down, suggesting, hinting, indicating, qualifying, it was almost a relief when Mr. Judkin, their chairman, and a strong man in word and deed, gave expression to their minds.

"There is no man," he said, "I respect more thoroughly than our minister, for he has worked hard and made our congregation what it is. He is well read and a good preacher, and no one can say a word against his life or conduct; but there is no question, and I think it is better that it should be said instead of being felt in secret, that somehow or other our minister is losing his hold upon the people, and that the congregation is not what it used to be in tone and in heart. My impression, brethren, is that while it might be a risk for us, and very likely we would never get any one who could do for us what our minister has done in the past, he has finished his work, and both sides would be better to make a change." And when Mr. Judkin looked round he saw that he had been understood, and was encouraged to continue to the end.

"Our minister has so good a position in the church, and his reputation is so high, that he could easily obtain another congregation if he wished. In fact, I have reason to believe that he has had opportunities, but has always refused to entertain the idea. There is no man in the congregation who would ask the minister to leave—certainly I shall not; but I am not sure but that a new beginning would be the best thing for the minister, and also, I am bound to add, might be a good thing for us. One thing I would like to say more, and that is about the finance. We are not a poor church, and we will always be able to pay our way, but we have a pretty heavy debit balance, and there was rather a poor response to the last appeal from the pulpit. If the congregation were in good heart, the necessary £400 could have been got in a week.

There was a pause, during which several brethren conveyed by looks and nods to Mr. Judkin that he had expressed their mind; and then the silence was broken by Mr. Stonier, who was distinguished in the congregation and outside of it by extreme parsimony in money matters, an entire absence of sentiment, and a ghastly frankness of speech. It was felt when he took up the speaking, that if Mr. Judkin had placed the nail in position, Mr. Stonier would hammer it in to the head, but you never can tell. "This," said Mr. Stonier, "is a conference, I suppose, when any man can say anything he pleases, and there are no rules of order. For myself, I did not know that I was going to sit tonight in judgment on the minister, and I didn't know that Mr. Judkin and the rest of you were going to ask him in some roundabout, gentlemanly, Christian, high-toned fashion to look out for another place. Oh, yes; that is just what you are after, but you are such a set of pussy-cats that you won't speak out and say what you mean! For myself, I've been a seat-holder in the church for fifteen years, and when I came here the church was nearly empty, and now it's quite full, and the minister has done fifteen years' hard work. Now, I do not set up to be a philanthropist, and I never gave a penny for the 'conversion of the Jews,' nor to the 'Society for Supplying Free Food to Street Lovers,' nor to any other of the schemes you gentlemen advocate. I am not what is called a large giver, but I hope I'm an honest man; and I tell you that if I had a man in my office who had served me fifteen years and done his work well, and I proposed to get rid of him because I was tired seeing the same man always at his desk and the same writing in the ledger, I should consider myself a scamp; and I thank God I never have done such a thing with any of my staff. If you can find any man who has been in my office and been dismissed because I wanted to see a new face, then I'll give £50 to Timbuctoo or any other mission you like." No one expected to earn the prize, for it was well known that although Mr. Stonier was as hard as nails to miscellaneous charity, he was an excellent master in his own office.

"As regards the deficit in the church funds, if that is the ground on which the minister is going to be dismissed, I'm prepared to pay the whole sum myself; and I do it, mark you, as a token of respect and gratitude—gratitude, see you, gentlemen, for fifteen years' honest work." No sooner had this outspoken man sat down than Mr. Lovejoy, the kindest and sweetest soul in all the congregation, who had been very restless for some time, ventured on speech.

"I do not wish to argue with my dear brethren who have spoken, for Brother Judkin is too strong for me, and no person could reply to Brother Stonier with his handsome offer. Most generous, and just like his kind heart, of which I have had experience for many years in my little charities; but that's a secret between Brother Stonier and me. What I want to say is that I loved our minister for what he is and for what he was to me in the time of my great sorrow. When . . . I lost my beloved wife he brought the Lord's consolation day by day to my heart, and our pulpit will never be the same to me without our minister." And that was all Mr. Lovejoy said.

It seemed, however, to touch a hidden spring in every one present, and one after another the office-bearers spoke. They seemed to have forgotten the matter before them and the delicate suggestion of Mr. Judkin. One rose to say that the minister had married him, and

he never could forget the marriage address; another had lost a little lad quite suddenly, and he did not think that his wife and he could have endured the trial had it not been for the minister's sympathy; a third had passed through worldly trials, and it was the minister's sermon that had kept him above water; and a fourth, who, as every one knew, had passed through fearful temptation, wished humbly to testify that he had not been that night an office-bearer in a Christian church without the minister's help in time of trouble. Others looked as if they could have spoken, several murmured sympathy, and one deacon surreptitiously used his handkerchief, and at last Mr. Judkin rose again and proved himself a man worthy to lead and to guide a church, because he could acknowledge an error and suit himself to new circumstances.

"Brethren," he said, "I expressed the feeling that was in my mind, and I am thankful that I gave it expression, for it has relieved me, and it has done good to you. Brother Stonier is quite right, and he has braced us up; and if he clears off the deficit, for which we are all much obliged, I shall be very glad if you allow me, brethren, to repaint the church this autumn, for the colors are getting a little faded, and I would like to do it as a sign of gratitude for what the minister was to my wife when our son was hanging between life and death." Mr. Judkin's example set the office-bearers upon a new track, one offering to supply the Sunday-school with new hymn books, about which there had been some difficulty; another declaring that if the mother church was going to be repainted, he would see that the mission church should also get a coat; a third promising to pay the quarter of a missionary's salary to take the burden off the minister's shoulders, and three other office-bearers appropriating the remaining quarters, till at last there was not a man who had not secured the right, personal to himself, of doing something, great or small, for the church, and every one was to do it out of gratitude to the minister for all he had been to them and all he had done for them during fifteen years. And finally Mr. Lovejoy melted all his brethren by a prayer, in which he carried both minister and people to the Throne of Grace, and so interceded that every one felt as he left the place that the blessing of God was resting upon him.

The week-night service was held on Wednesday, and, as a rule, was very poorly attended. On this week the minister had come down to his vestry with a low heart, and was praying that he might have grace to address Mr. Lovejoy and a handful of devout and honorable women without showing that he was discouraged himself and without discouraging them. There were days in the past when the service had been held in the church, and Mr. Judkin used to boast in the city about the attendance; and then it descended from the church to the large hall; but of late the few who attended had been gathered into a room, because it was more cheerful to see a room nearly full than a hall three parts empty. The room was next door to the vestry, and the minister could tell before he went in whether the number would rise or fall above the average thirty. This evening so many feet passed his door, and there was such a hum of life, that he concluded there would be forty, which was a high attendance, and he began to reproach himself for cowardice and unbelief. He was looking out the hymns when the door opened, and Mr. Lovejoy came in with such evident satisfaction upon his gracious face that the minister was certain some good thing had happened. "Excuse me interrupting you," said the good man, "but I came to ask whether you would mind going into the hall tonight? The room is full already, and more are coming every minute. I should not wonder to see a hundred, perhaps two," and Mr. Lovejoy beamed and quite unconsciously shook hands afresh with the minister.

"You may be sure that I shall be only too glad, but . . . what is the meaning of this? Do they know that I am preaching myself?" And the minister seemed anxious lest the people should have been brought in the hope of hearing some distinguished stranger.

"Of course they know, and that is why they have come," responded Mr. Lovejoy with great glee; "no other person could have brought them, and if you didn't preach tonight, it would be the greatest disappointment the people ever had; but I must hurry off to see that everything is right in the hall," and in a minute the minister heard the sound of many voices as the people poured joyfully from the room into the hall, and even in the vestry he was conscious of a congregation. As he was speculating on the meaning of it all the door opened again and Mr. Lovejoy returned.

"We hadn't faith enough," he cried; "we ought to have gone to the church at once. Brother Stonier said in his usual decided way, 'No half measures into the church with you'; but I was afraid there would not be enough. I was wrong, quite wrong, the church will be nicely filled from back to front, for the people are coming in a steady stream—it's just great to see them. I'll come back for you when they are all seated; but give them time, it's not easy moving from one place to another as we've been doing tonight; but we'll not move another Wednesday, we'll just settle down in the church as in the former days," and Mr. Lovejoy left the vestry walking on air.

When the minister went in the church was almost full, and he had some difficulty in giving out the first hymn, for it came upon him that his people had seen that he was discouraged and that this was a rally of affection. The prayer was even harder for him than the hymn, although his heart was deeply moved in gratitude to God and tender intercession for men. And then when he came to the address he threw aside what he had prepared, for it seemed to him too cold and formal, and he read the One Hundred and Twenty-sixth Psalm slowly and with a trembling voice, and instead of commentary, he paused between the verses, and the people understood. When he read the last verse—"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"—he hesitated a moment, and then pronounced the benediction. After a minute's silent prayer he lifted his head and found the people still waiting. Mr. Judkin rose, and coming forward to the desk, thanked the minister audibly for all his work; and then they all came—men women and children—and each in his own way said the same thing; and the story went abroad that Richard Stonier, who came last and said nothing, had broken down for the first and last time in his life.—The British Weekly.