

The Winning of Souls

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II. WHAT CAME OUT OF A MISTAKE

I want to show how the Lord overruled a mistake, to the advancement of His cause in the winning of souls to the Saviour. On the second Sunday in July, 1904, we began tent services in a new section of the city, in connection with the church which I then had the honor to serve. The meetings were continued until the end of September, and were largely attended. Among the children who came there was a little girl named Ethel. She was about eleven years old, and at first did not seem to take much interest in the meetings.

During the following winter a wooden structure was erected as a temporary home for a Sunday School and church, and when the School was organized, she united with one of the classes. Some months later, when a congregation was being organized, she intimated to her teacher that she would like to become a church member, and gave the teacher her name on a card. When the new members were being received, her name was not called, and she could not understand the omission. The teacher asserted that she gave in Ethel's card with other cards, and she blamed the Clerk of Session for mislaying it. Later on, however, the teacher discovered that she had made the mistake, so she explained the matter to the little girl and apologized.

Ethel, while disappointed, was satisfied with the explanation, but her father was very angry, and on the following Thursday night, half an hour before our mid-week service began, he came over to the church and brought Ethel with him. He said he came to see me about the way his little girl had been treated. I explained the matter to him again, but he was ugly and angry, and added that if she did unite with the church, she would have a lonely time, for not one out of his house went to any church. I might add that, for twenty years, he had been a heavy drinker, and a few nights prior to this, while intoxicated, he had smashed some of the furniture in his home. He retained a good posi-

tion because he was a first-class workman, and it would have been difficult to get a man to take his place.

I asked him if he would come to the Brotherhood meeting on Sunday morning, but he positively refused. Then I requested him to remain for the meeting that evening just to please his little girl, and at last he consented. They sat by themselves at one side of the building, apart from the other people. That evening I read the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel by Luke, and when I came to the tenth verse where it says, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth", I stopped, looked at him and said, "O man, if you would repent of your sins and turn to God, you could move all heaven, for there would be joy in the presence of the angels over your salvation." Then I said to him, "Will you do it? Will you rise as an indication that you want to give yourself to God?" I could see him tremble while he rose. The tears were running down his cheeks. I left the platform and went down to where he was. He said he was too great a sinner to be saved, but I tried to show him that there was "a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea", and that whosoever comes to the Saviour will be accepted regardless of the past.

The effect of this incident on the congregation was wonderful, and I need not add that the meeting became intensely interesting. It is sufficient to say that the next Sunday morning he was at the Brotherhood meeting to request the men to pray for his wife and family, as he wanted to see them all brought into the kingdom of God.

The prayers were answered, and I had the privilege of baptizing him and three of his daughters. Since then he has not touched strong drink, but has been an earnest and successful fisher of men. His associates and neighbors have had to acknowledge that nothing but the grace of God could have saved and kept him, and he can sing with great truthfulness,

"Oh! to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!"

The little Ethel of those days is a young lady now, but she often thanks God for the