

# Northern Messenger

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## Why the Pastor Left Sargon.

### A TRUE STORY.

(I. R. E. Land, in the Chicago 'Standard.)

#### Chapter I.—The Graduation.

On a beautiful morning in May, 189—, Alfred Ralston sat in his room in the Theological Seminary, looking out upon the world. Everything was bright and inviting. The glad radiance of spring rested on the face of nature and the well-kept seminary grounds made a lovely picture in the morning sunshine.

'Bright, bright,' exclaimed the young man, rising as he spoke, 'all is bright and beautiful.' And in his eager restlessness he paced the room.

Alfred Ralston was one of the members of the graduating class, and the class graduated that evening. He was among the leading men of his class, rather tall and slender, but well built, with intellectual face, giving one the appearance of reserve strength, physically and mentally. His face was flushed and his eyes sparkled with suppressed excitement. Had not the long-wished-for day arrived; the day toward which all his years of training pointed? Was he not to graduate to-night? Was not his ardent ambition to preach the gospel of Christ about to be realized? Yes, his seminary days were past and work—active work, was now before him. The thought was exhilarating to him.

That morning he went over his past years of training. He remembered when he had first thought of the ministry, how far it seemed above him. He remembered his high hopes at entering college, and how delightful the acquisition of knowledge had been to him. But side by side with that increase of knowledge had grown in his heart an unrest, at times almost painful. He was a sincere Christian, true as steel, loyal to Christ with an intense devotion.

He had hoped to find the seminary a haven of rest, but in that he had been disappointed. His three years there had been blessed years of instruction. The professors were men of piety and learning. They had shown an especial interest in him which he appreciated, but—well, he didn't know himself what it was, but there was still in his soul a hunger. Action, he felt, would at last quiet his restless, hungry heart—active work for God. He was one of the speakers at the graduation exercises, and many long remembered his earnest address on the 'Religious Problem of Our Day.' That night his old life closed behind him.

#### CHAPTER II.—Taking up the Work.

A few weeks before his graduation Mr. Ralston had received a call from a church in Sargon, a small church in Iowa, and he had accepted it. Accordingly the day after his graduation, he and his young wife (for he had married before his graduation) were speeding westward. Arrived at



#### DOWN BY THE SHORE.

Down by the shore at morning  
Wearily moans the sea;  
The brown wrack clings to the bare grey  
rocks,

And the wind sighs drearily.  
The mist creeps over the waters  
From windward on to the lee,  
Wrapping the ships in its cold embrace  
Sadly and silently.

Down by the shore at evening  
The mists are rolling away  
In long white wreaths, on the solemn hills  
That shelter the lonely bay.  
Bright with a rare effulgence,

The golden clouds are furled,  
And the faint blue peaks o'er the distant  
sea  
Seem the dream of another world.

Down by the sea of sorrow  
The mists lay cold and grey,  
And never a glimpse of the gracious sun  
Broke through the gloom that day.  
But the clouds were rolled together,  
Just ere the daylight died,  
And we saw the land of Beulah smile  
In the light of eventide.

—J. M. Dunmore.

Sargon, they found the people very enthusiastic. One evening shortly after their arrival a 'surprise party' came to the parsonage and each brought a present. Young Ralston looked forward to his work with joy.

'Esther,' he said to his wife, one day, 'I hope I shall be able to fulfil the hopes of this congregation, for they are devoted to us.'

Alas, he did not know that he was the fourth minister this congregation had had in six years, and that on their first arrival all had been thus received.

However, deeply in earnest himself, he began preaching and sought to make himself an able minister of God's word. He was a fluent speaker, and used simple, plain language, so he gained the approbation of his listeners at once. Many were the compliments he received on his preaching. But these compliments troubled him. No one thanked him because he had made any truth plainer, or helped them, but they said, 'they enjoyed his sermon very much.' He noticed, too, that when he went into any careful exposition of a scripture passage, the congregation lost interest and seemed to think he was boring them.

Another thing which he could not understand was his prayer-meeting. None of his officers came, except one of the

younger men; none of the deacons came; none of his country people came. Happening down town one evening late he saw several of his country members together, and in talking they said they were at lodge, that they had a meeting once a week. He asked himself why it was they did not ever come to prayer-meeting.

Another thing that troubled him was that when he made his calls his members seemed to avoid the subject of religion. They would talk and visit on everything, but if he began to talk of Jesus or the Bible, they had little to say. He soon found out that most of the people remembered little or nothing of the sermons on which he had expended so much toil. Altogether after three months in Sargon he found so much that was the very opposite from what he had expected that his old enemy—heart-hunger—came back. But it was a different kind of hunger now. He was not hungry now for more truth for himself, but hungry to find souls ready to learn the truths he felt himself able to teach.

#### Chapter III.—Misgivings.

'Is Mr. Ralston in?' eagerly enquired an aged lady one day at the parsonage. She had come in haste to get him to visit her son, who had been very sick for some