

Nathan White lived; but her influence seemed rather lessened since his death, for the reason before stated, that the church seemed shorn of its spirituality. Over this sad fact Aunt Baker mourned with a constant sorrow. She had not wept when the good minister died, for by faith she saw him in his angels garment, amidst the purified, walking the golden streets, eating from the tree of life, drinking of the river that flows by the throne of the Lamb, and her soul rejoiced that he had gone home to the Master he loved so well. But she mourned when the stately stepplings of Jehovah ceased to be heard among them; and, as she often told them, it was not the Lord's fault, but all their own. They had depended too much on an arm of flesh; now if they went to the living God, he would be gracious. But they heeded not. O, how she prayed for them! night and day they lay near her heart, but her prayers seemed not to be answered; the church grew colder and colder, until it seemed as if the world had taken the place of the Saviour. It was as if strangers had stood in the holy place where Jesus had wept, and looked coolly on the ground bedewed by his anguish.

Time sped on, and the church still kept in the back-ground. By-and-by, as the members fell off, some by death, some by marriage, entering other places of worship, and some getting tired of the homely meeting house and the quiet preacher, who had wedded in their midst, joining themselves to more modern congregations; the stated meeting for prayer grew so thin, that it became almost a by-word. Had you gone into the vestry of that church, lighted dimly as it was, you might have seen, at long distances apart, here an old man his chin upon his cane—there one old lady, with closed eyes, holding communion with her God, and some seven or eight others, striving to keep up the form of godliness. "How different it was in Father White's time!" they would say to one another, as they slowly broke up, after the few prayers and the few songs of Zion. Ay—how widely different! Then every seat was filled; then little children and young maidens and young men crowded to the sanctuary. Now the travelling circus and the hotel steps were always full. Now the corners of the village streets never lacked their crowd, but the sanctuary was neglected.

It was a cold night in February, six years after Father White had been laid in the grave. Within the little cottage of Aunt Baker the dishes had been cleared away, the hearth swept up, a blazing fire sent its cheerful light out even to the panes of the window, lighting the road beyond. Aunt Baker never shut her blinds until she went to rest. It was a cheery sight, she said, of a dark night, for the passer-by to see the token of a pleasant fire-side, as he was going his way. It seemed selfish to shut all up, especially when there was no moon, as was the case to night.

Every article in the little room was polished till it shone again; there was a plentiful supply of wood in the closet, a grey cat purred upon the hearth; and the red stocking she was knitting for some favorite child, added its small quota of cheerful color to the surroundings.

"I declare! it does seem a cold night to go out in," mused Aunt Baker, shrugging her shoulders a little as if she heard the wind whistle. "But then if the rest fail in their duty because of these trifling things, I musn't fail in mine. I can't see that prayer meeting go down; I can't! Forty years have I listened to the prayers of God's children there; and shall I desert it now when the cause is bleeding and dying? O no, no; to be sure, I'm nigh on to eighty, but the dear Lord has given me health and a measure of strength; I cannot see that prayer meeting go down."

So saying, she arose, her face alight with the joy of her resolve, and saying, "I know the Lord won't disappoint me; I know he won't," she put on hood and cloak, lit the little horn lantern she always carried, and hastened to the church. The vestry was lighted and warmed, and the sexton, an old man, sat by the fire. Greetings were exchanged, and the two waited for somebody to come. An hour passed, and Aunt Baker said, solemnly, "let us pray," and kneeling down, she besought God to appear in their midst. The sexton followed with another prayer; they sang a hymn together and the meeting was closed. Still, strange to say, Aunt Baker did not feel as much discouraged as she had. "I know the Lord is going to appear," she said again and again; "we shall have better prayer meetings after this."

Poor Aunt Baker! what was her consternation to hear it announced from the pulpit, on the succeeding Sabbath, that, on account of the small attendance, the prayer meeting would be given up for the remainder of the winter.

"Give up the prayer meeting!" she exclaimed, great tears running down her cheeks; "give up the prayer meeting! Oh, I hadn't expected this. The Lord is trying me.