

Defended.

(Christian Advocate.)

He stood rather disconsolately looking out of the one window his room afforded. Not that there was much of interest to see from it—a long row of back yards adorned with clothes-lines and ash barrels, with here and there an attempt at a flower garden. This morning it was all covered with a soft white snowfall that made it a little better to look at than usual.

But almost anything was better than the view indoors. Such a poor, unhomelike room, in this unhomelike boarding-house, one of a type sadly too common in our large cities.

Ernest Holmes looked, as he stood in the dusty, ill-kept room, decidedly out of place. He was a fine specimen of young manhood, with an honest face and clear good eyes, even though this morning they looked from under a clouded brow. He was on the verge of temptation, and, though he did not realize it, his yielding would mean a downward tendency possibly to his whole life. He would not acknowledge to himself that he was troubling over the right or wrong of the question at all. Rather, he insisted if it were not for the expense, which he knew he ought not to incur, he would have settled the whole thing long ago. It was only a sleigh-ride arranged by some young folks. Two of the young men were his fellow-boarders, and had invited him to make one of their number.

They were to leave town at eight o'clock in the evening, take a two hours' ride to a village, have supper and a dance, then home again.

The desire to go was very great. He was country bred and this was his first winter in a large city and he had tingled to his very finger tips every time a sleigh with tinkling bells had passed him.

To do him justice it was the sleigh-ride, and not the wine supper and dance, that had been the temptation.

How badly he wanted to go nobody but himself could quite understand. He felt his loneliness in this great crowded city so keenly. The young men who had invited him had been the first to show him any friendliness. If he refused to go, they would be offended and though they were not very choice friends, they were better than none. Of course, he reasoned with himself, he will not touch their wine. In the quiet village life he had led, he had not learned to dance, so he would not enjoy that part of it.

'Why in the name of sense,' he burst out to himself, 'can't they leave off the last? The sleigh-ride is all that's really good about it. Just think! they say it is full two hours' ride out there and back home, in this beautiful moonlight. O yes, I think I will go. It was courteous in the boys to invite me, I'm such a stranger, and I can't do less than accept.'

So it was decided that he would let the young men know at their dinner hour that he would go.

It wanted but a few minutes of being time to start for his work down town, so he left the window and turned to open his bible that lay on the dust-covered stand for his morning reading. It was an old custom that had grown up with him and somehow still clung—this reading a bit of God's word before the work of the day.

He was, after a sort, trying to be a Christian. There had not much help been given to him since he left the quiet home and mother, and he knew when he stopped to think of it, he was not making much progress in that life. Still, he read the little bible every morning. More than often it was some part of the great book that did not touch his life, something forgotten almost as soon as read.

Sometimes he had a feeling that the dear, dead father knew about it and was pleased. Not that he often thought about it at all. The chains of habit were strong, and this was one of those things the wise father and mother had helped grow into a habit.

This morning he turned the leaves with unusual carelessness. His mind was not wholly at ease, though he thought his decision was made. There would creep in a little something like regret, which Ernest fancied was on account of the expense.

At last he opened to a chapter, and glanced over a few verses without knowing what he read. Suddenly the next words seemed to read themselves into his very heart: 'I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.'

Just in an instant it flashed over him that 'this city,' meant, not the one the word had been written about years ago, but the one God meant this morning. 'This city,' that was himself—he, Ernest Holmes—God was pledging himself to 'defend.' Could it be true? His brain was wholly awake now. Thoughts came thronging fast. Did he need defence? Was his life a precious thing to God? 'For mine own sake.' Ah, the tenderness of it, the infinite love! his eyes were fastened on the words. Such strength for such weakness. It came with added meaning each moment. 'This city'—his heart—the place where thine honor dwelleth. God was pledged to defend.

Had he really been in such danger? Did this apparently harmless pleasure mean a strategy of Satan to overcome 'this city?' He stood still, looking at the words, almost appalled at the insight he was gaining into his own heart. Then there sounded a rap at his door and a message; there was a gentleman in the parlor to see him. Ernest went down hardly caring who it might be, though a visitor was a rare thing with him. He was still thinking of the clear, direct message he had read, when he entered the shabby little parlor to meet a tall, kindly-faced man, who stepped forward and held out both hands to the young man.

The voice was cordial and winning: 'So it is my old friend's boy! I believe I should have known you. The eyes are the same though the last time I saw you I held you on my knees. I only last night heard that you were in town, and your father and I were such old friends that I took the first chance I had of seeing you. Why did you not let me know of your whereabouts before? Did you not think I wanted to know Henry's boy. You should have let me know as soon as you came. By the way,' and there was a little laugh, 'I wonder if you know who it is who has taken you by storm this way? My name is Grey, Dr. Grey. Do you remember your father's old friend?'

'I remember you perfectly, Doctor,' Ernest replied quickly, then he stopped a moment, as the memory of the old hero worshipping days came back to him, when he had ranked this same doctor only second to his father. There was the slightest suspicion of a quiver in his voice as he went on, 'Mother was not certain of your address, and we thought maybe you had forgotten us. We were poor. We did not want to be a trouble to you.'

Two strong hands were laid on the boy's shoulders, as his friend turned him so the light fell full in his face. No sort of an answer was made to the last words.

'Yes, you have your father's eyes,' He talked rapidly to hide the young man's embarrassment. 'I hope you are trying to be the man he was. I am glad I met you; I have half a dozen things I want to talk with you about.'

The doctor glanced at his watch, 'I have an engagement to see a sick man in half an hour. That will give me time to drive you down town and I can say some of the things

I want to say on the way down.'

And before the astonished young person had time to think of the pleasure in store for him he was tucked in the fur robes and skimming down the broad avenue in Dr. Grey's handsome sleigh.

Meanwhile the doctor was busy talking. He was one of those men wise in the skill of catching souls for his Master, and something in the young man's face had spoken to his heart that some sort of a struggle was going on in the life; possibly he was in danger; he must put out a hand to help. He asked no questions. It was hardly advice he offered. Just a suggestion here, a hint there. Strong helpful words, that were cheery and bright with the real sympathy that lay behind them.

Plans were laid and engagements made, so skillfully, so as a matter of course, that Ernest had no choice but to accept. He was to come to the doctor's house that evening to help in addressing some circulars that had to be sent out. The next night he was invited again.

A subdued exclamation escaped the young man as he heard this plan. To-morrow night! The very night that but a short hour ago he fancied he wanted to spend in that sleigh-ride. How distasteful it all seemed now! How much more attractive this other way. A new life was opened to him. He had found a friend; that was about what it meant. No, one had been sent to him. Something of awe stole in his heart. It seemed so plain. God had done it, 'I will defend this city.'

He had but little time during the busy day to think about it, but when he reached his room that night, he walked straight over to the little half-opened bible and found the morning's verse. He read it aloud this time, each word ringing out a direct message to him. His heart was full. God was good to him. Why should he care so much? 'For mine own sake.' The last words read so wonderfully; 'And for my servant David's sake.'

There came a glad smile over the boy's face. 'I suppose that means father. I know God loved him, and father was his servant. Maybe it was for father's sake, Dr. Grey was sent to me this morning, that 'this city,' might be 'defended.'

Those Girls Did it.

In a small village in Pennsylvania, says 'The Presbyterian,' lives a clergyman's wife, whose gentle and unfailing ministrations are devoted to an aged father, a mother, and an invalid child. She cannot afford a servant, so is a good deal confined to her house. To her surprise she was told that she had been chosen a delegate to the Woman's Synodical Meeting for Home Missions.

She said she could not go, she could not be spared. But the young girls of the parish declared she must, so like an avalanche they descended on the parsonage. They brought new silk to make the important sleeves for the old silk dress, they renovated her wardrobe generally, and pledged themselves to take turns in the housework during her absence. Then they wrote to the Reception Committee, that their minister's wife was coming to the meeting, and to take good care of her.

She was sent to one of the most delightful homes in the place, given the best guest chamber, taken to ride by her hostess, who devoted herself to giving her a good time. In a 'before-going-to-bed talk' the visitor told a fellow-guest the story, adding:

'And to think that I have met the President of the Executive Committee, besides all my enjoyment of the meeting. She has been a phantom, read of, and heard of, but now I have really seen her and talked to her, I shall go home to my auxiliary and tell them all about these meetings.'