

The Minister whose Day was Done

By Hugh S. Eayrs.

THE board of elders at Ebenezer had had enough of it. One of them said he didn't want to be un-Christian, but there was a limit to human endurance. Another made remarks to the effect that some people didn't seem to know when they were due to retire. A third said he had thought for a long time that the minister would really have to go, but he had kept silent, sacrificing himself and his convictions on the altar of charitable thought, but that now, when Brother Mandell felt it time to speak, and Brother Talbot really could not restrain himself, he (the conviction-sacrificing one) was convinced that it was his duty to open his mouth. He trusted he wouldn't be misunderstood, but really—and a shrug of the shoulders proved even more expressive.

The situation was this: The Rev. James Postelthwaite had come to Ebenezer twenty-five years ago. He accepted a unanimous invitation to the pastorate. He was then a man of forty-five, with a good record behind him, and a glowing future before him. In the city church where he had ministered before he came to Ebenezer he had been acknowledged a good preacher, and a better pastor. He had seen the work of his Master prosper under his guiding hand. He had preached sermons that did men good, plain, unvarnished sermons on how to live, and not so very much on how not to live. His life had been the embodiment, week by week, of the texts he had chosen on the Sunday before. He was known throughout the length and breadth of his cure as a good man and a true, and his usefulness was undoubted. He had no time for higher criticism; he had no time for anything but the plain, simple, but beautiful gospel, which had made saints of men and women from time immemorial, and which, faithfully construed and faithfully preached, would go on making saints as long as the world provided the raw material. This same gospel he preached.

Hence his call to Ebenezer, in 1889, when the religion of the fathers of the pewholders in Ebenezer was good enough for those who worshipped then and there. He had ministered for twenty-five years. His people had wanted him to stay. At first he was invited elsewhere, but he gave up his chances to stay with the people he had come to love. Latterly, the chances to move up higher had come less frequently. Invitations ceased to come altogether, and James Postelthwaite began to feel that he would end his days ministering to the folk of Ebenezer in the quiet country town. But for two years now there had been murmurings. Mr. Postelthwaite was getting old. His sermons were "behind the times." The religion of the fathers was not good enough for the present generation. The younger element became more and more prominent in the church, as chairs on the board of elders and seats at the trustee board were vacated by those whom God had called to himself. The younger element wanted a new leader. A block further down Main street, the vicar was a young man fresh from college, with a young man's enthusiasm and a young man's predilections, and a young man's methods. The congregation at Ebenezer began to say: "Mr. Postelthwaite is getting old. He no longer preaches interestingly. Very often what he has to say is suited not to 1914, but to the needs of twenty years ago. We want a change. We want a young man. Mr. Postelthwaite should go." And the board of elders, innocently forgetting the long service of a man who had grown old in their midst, and who had spent his energies for the betterment of their very selves, decided that Mr. Postelthwaite should be asked to resign.

II.

A deputation waited on the old man, at his house one day. With business-like brusqueness, the subject was broached. The speaker didn't want Mr. Postelthwaite to think that Ebenezer was unmindful of what he had been to and what he had done for them. O dear no! But—didn't Mr. Postelthwaite think the church needed, perhaps, a younger man? Didn't Mr. Postelthwaite think that, perhaps, he needed a complete rest? Didn't Mr. Postelthwaite feel that he had come to the time when he might take a house

somewhere, and enjoy the twilight of his days free from the cares and anxieties of a charge? All these and many more hints were thrown out by the kind elder to the old minister. It was astonishing how solicitous the elder was about the minister's twilight days.

And James Postelthwaite knew that he must resign.

That night, he drew his chair before his fire, and gave himself up to thinking. Twenty-five years he had been at Ebenezer. He had seen some changes, aye, he had helped to bring those changes. Men and women had grown older. The very elder who had voiced the feeling of the people had been a curly-headed laddie when James Postelthwaite first came to Ebenezer. He was an old man, an old man, now. Perhaps the young folk were right. Perhaps Ebenezer needed a new and a younger leader. But it was hard to go. Of course, it was natural. Men do come, and men do go. There are some things that are constant in the world, but they seem to be narrowed down to a very few. He thought he had done his duty. He thought he had done what he could. Of course, it couldn't be as good as a younger man's best. But he had done what he could. For twenty-five years he had worked, and toiled, and prayed for Ebenezer. He knew everybody there. He bore their sorrows; he shared their joys. Those twenty-five years had been a means of grace to him. He had hoped they might have been a means of grace to his people. He had become wrapped up in Ebenezer. He hardly knew how he would bear to leave the dear old church, with its so precious associations. But he would have to go. And he was an old man, an old, old man.

It is significant that in the ruminations and reflections of this old minister he never thought once that Ebenezer had been ungrateful. He never thought that his being asked to make room for younger blood was but slight thanks for all he had been, and all he had done. The thought never entered his mind that such treatment was but slight and scant reward. Never for a moment did it occur to him to think that there was something wrong with a world that treated an old man so. For James Postelthwaite was one of those kings among men who are single-minded, who see but the best in a man, whose vision can never include the ulterior and the inferior. He had never once thought of the ingratitude of the folks he had lived with, and lived for.

III.

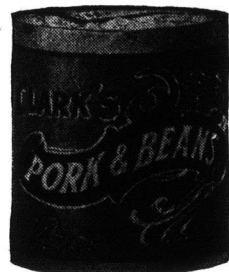
He took down his hat from the peg in the corner, and went out. There had been a time when there was a young wife to kiss fondly, when he left the house—but that was many years ago. God, in His infinite mercy, had called her away, and her husband had never cared to think of another in her place.

The night was harsh. The wind, swirling round the corners, caught up anything that came in its path, sweeping it up and throwing it down. It was raining, too, fast and hard, and James Postelthwaite buttoned up his meagre overcoat, and prepared to face the elements. It did not occur to him that his ingress into the repelling night was suggestive of the journey he must take, when his resignation from his charge took effect. He did not know why he came out. He did not know where he was going. Somehow he felt impelled to get into the fight, between the wind and the storm. On and on and on he walked. Suddenly, startlingly, he heard a cry. He was passing some cottages on the outskirts of the little town, and he fancied the cry came from somewhere near at hand. He stopped to listen. The cry came again, and he thought he located it. On his right was a cottage standing alone. There was a light in the window, and the minister crept close to listen. The cry, more of a moan than a cry, came again and again. He lifted the latch and entered. In a corner was a bed, with a man upon it. He seemed to be in an agony of sweat. Pale, emaciated, shrunken, he was an awful replica of what he might have been, what he once must have been. The minister paused a minute, and went up to the moaning, sobbing figure on the bed. In a moment

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