

IS IT ONLY "THE DREAM OF A DREAMER?"

BY MAUD PETITT.

It was twilight, and Dr. Walton, sitting by his study window, watched the shadows deepen about the old church, of which he was pastor. The passers-by were many, for it was Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve on Fifth Avenue, with its crowded street-cars and hurrying pavements! But Dr. Walton was not intent on street life just then. A sigh escaped his lips, and he rose and paced the room restlessly for a few moments, then sat down again, his eyes rivetted on an article in one of our Methodist papers. It was only a few paragraphs, headed, "A Crisis!" and such words as these met his glance:

"Methodism in a crucial place—Need to run up the danger-signal—The whole denomination startled by the smallness of our numerical increase—Revivals less frequent and less fruitful—Formalism increases—The spirit of aggressiveness beginning to wane."

No wonder he sighed still more heavily as he laid the paper down. Was it a mistake after all, then? a dying cause—this, to which he had given his strength, his manhood, his whole being? Was it a sinking ship? A mere outburst of religious enthusiasm to flourish awhile, then wane like the power of Mahomet, yea, even more quickly? Ah, how he had fought for it! Like a flash the past burst on him; the days when he was a bare-foot boy on his father's poor little bush farm, and, later on, the struggles of his college days, the close economies, the threadbare coats, the labour in workshop or on farm during his vacation, and the hours of midnight toil to cultivate every talent for the use of his Master! The long years of untiring zeal in the pastorate! And now that his hairs were turning gray, must he hear it pronounced a waning cause? Ah, it was bitter—very bitter.

And yet was Methodism a failure? No, never! So long as its churches, like mighty bulwarks, should dot hill and valley, all over the land! So long as it should sound the name of Jesus from Canada to Japan, from Greenland to India, from England to

the South Seas! Never! Never! Never!

But yet was there not a little coldness and formality creeping in—yes, right there in Fifth Avenue church? Was the warm pulse throbbing there that had throbbed in the coal mines of England, and in that primitive dwelling of Paul Heck? Did he himself think only of winning the people to Christ, or had he, too, a dream of being everybody's favourite, of "making a success," as we term it? Perhaps so.

And he closed his eyes a little sadly as he leaned back in his chair. His daughter was playing a soothing dreamland air, and the notes sounded fainter and fainter, and farther off, till he scarcely heard their ripple in his dream, then nearer and stronger, and sweeter, till they broke into the clear chime of the Christmas bells. It was Christmas Sunday.

There was a hallowed hush in the vestry, as he knelt there; the bells ceased chiming; the great organ pealed forth its measured waves, and the pastor of Fifth Avenue church took his place. But, lo! was this his congregation? Whence came all these people? People in silks and furs? Yes, they were there. But that was not all. Why, there were people in rags and patches; people in old coats and half-crushed hats! Where? Up in the gallery? No, right here in the best seats. Look in Judge Arthur's pew, at those four little ragamuffins, and there in Dr. Pearce's seat, that old, friendless-looking couple, and just across the aisle, in the pew of Mr. Ormond, M.P., the degraded-looking fellow, who lay drunk by the roadside the day before. There was every type of humanity there, from the cultured and refined Miss Arthur, down to the fallen daughters of Eve.

Then something moved Dr. Walton to speak as he had never spoken, to hold up the bleeding hands, to picture the thorn-crowned brow, and, more terrible still, that refined and sensitive soul, borne down under the awful darkness of our sensuality and sin. Surely he had never pleaded