

tears gathered in his bright eyes. 'Dear Jesus. How good!'

'Don't you remember, you have sung many a time——' and Archie began to sing—

'Though we are sinners every one,
Jesus died!

And though our crown of peace is gone,
Jesus died!

We may be cleansed from every stain,
We may be crowned with peace again,
And in that land of bliss may reign—
Jesus died!

The young heart so lately tossed and troubled, was now at peace. Instead of fear at the thought of God; there was gladness; instead of despair, there was hope and joy, as he rested simply on the word of God, which he had found so exceeding precious.—'The Presbyterian.'

The Deacon's Prayer.

(By Kate W. Hamilton, in 'Wellspring'.)

It was not the prayer in itself that was remarkable, for it was the same old prayer that the deacon had been offering for thirty years, and it was so common and painfully familiar, that the boys in the back seat tittered when it began, and even the minister faintly sighed.

There were several things to make the minister sigh that evening. It was rainy—not very rainy for ordinary purposes, but entirely too much so for a prayer-meeting—and the always small gathering was smaller than usual. The room was not a cheerful one at best, and the audience was scattered drearily over it, instead of gathering socially and comfortably at the front. The four boys in the back seat were not regular attendants, and their unwonted presence might have been an encouragement had not the minister suspected the truth—that they had run in to escape a sudden dash of rain.

Despite all disheartening circumstances, the minister tried to make the small meeting a success. He wanted it to be a help and an inspiration to those who came, and he selected bright hymns, chose an interesting theme, and tried to treat it in a fresh and unhackneyed manner. And then, at the first pause for voluntary exercises, arose Deacon Elliot with his thirty-year-old prayer. One of the mischievous boys at the rear whispered the information that it was not only thirty years old but 'thirty miles long.' Was it any wonder that the minister sighed?

However, it may have sounded differently higher up from the way it did in the dreary little lecture-room; for there was One who knew that the deacon was tired that night; that his rheumatism reminded him of his not being so young as he once had been, and that he had put away the newspaper and slippers that had tempted him at his own fireside, and had resolutely come out into the damp evening to take his place and to do his part because he felt it to be a duty.

But the prayer was undeniably long. It went through all the needs of the church and the town, wandered to far-off mission-fields, embraced the islands of the sea and the uttermost ends of the earth, and returned to ask 'help for the poor and needy; succor for the drunkard, the tempted, and the out-cast.' By the time it ended, and a hymn was announced, the rain outside had nearly ceased. The boys slipped out during the singing, and laughed as they reached the street.

'Comprehensive, wasn't it, Jim? I didn't know but that we'd have to stay all the evening,' commented one.

Walking unsteadily toward them up the wet, glistening street came one who had not

fared so well in securing shelter from the storm. His shabby clothes were drenched, and his soft hat drooped shapelessly over his face, so that the boys did not recognize the well-known figure until it jostled against them in its ill-directed efforts to pass by.

'Dick Melby, what on earth are you doing out in the rain?' asked Jim.

'Trying—trying to let the crowd get past,' responded Dick, gravely, leaning back against a neighboring wall, as if he were allowing a procession the right of way.

'It doesn't take very many to make a crowd when you see double, and can't walk without taking the whole pavement,' laughed one of the boys. 'Your head is crooked, Dick.'

'Feet's crooked,' amended Dick. 'Got 'em sort of twisted up somewheres.'

'It's easy to guess where,' declared Jim, half in earnest, half in mischief. 'Say, Dick, you ought to stop this sort of thing and reform. Deacon Elliot wants you to straighten up. We've just come from the church back there, and we heard him say so.'

'Deacon Elliot wants—wants me?' repeated Dick. Years before Dick had been in the deacon's employ, and he caught at the name. 'No, he don't. He wouldn't have me,' he added, some misty memory struggling through his brain. 'Said I wasn't steady enough to work for him.'

'Well, he was praying for the drunkard anyway, and I'm afraid that means you, Dick.'

'If he wants me I'm his man. Don't have to pray for me; I'll go for the askin',' declared Dick, trying to stand stiffly erect.

'You'd better go home out of the wet,' counselled the boys. The rain was beginning again, and they hurried on. Dick looked after them a moment, and started in the opposite direction. He had been walking the streets aimlessly, but now the idea that he was wanted somewhere took possession of him. 'Didn't use to be had to work for, deacon didn't,' he muttered. 'If he wants me I'm his man.'

He reached the church and turned into the vestibule. That he was sheltered from the slowly-falling rain scarcely mattered, since he had been exposed to the heavier showers; but he wanted to see the deacon, and some lingering sense of propriety prevented him from pushing his way into the inner room, where a murmur of voices and then a hymn told that the meeting was still in progress. Presently it ended and the people slowly passed out. The deacon, who had been sitting near the front, was almost the last to leave, and Dick joined him as he went down the steps.

'Here I am, Mr. Elliot,' he said.

'Eh,' answered the old man, peering at him in the dim light, and thinking some one of his fellow-worshippers had joined him. 'I can't see very well, out here. Who is it?'

'Dick Melby—feller you jest been prayin' for, an' here I am.'

His answer revealed not only his identity, but the fact of his semi-intoxication, and the deacon turned from him in disgust.

'Melby, you've been drinking,' he said, severely.

'Takes some drinkin' to make a drunkard, deacon, and the boys told me that's what you were prayin' for,' urged Dick, with what, in his uncertain state, seemed to him unanswerable logic.

It did not so appear to the deacon. He decided it was folly to waste words on a man who was in no condition to understand what was said to him, and so walked on, with his umbrella held low over his head, and quite unconscious that Dick was doggedly following him. At his own gate, which was on the outskirts of the small

town, he was delayed for a moment by a refractory latch, and the dripping figure was again beside him. The old gentleman stared in amazement.

'What did you come away out here for?' he demanded.

'Cause you prayed for me. I reckon folks don't pray for what they don't want, do they?'

Certainly the deacon had what he did not want, however it came, and he looked doubtfully at his follower. The walk had been an uncomfortable one, even when protected by his umbrella, and he could not resist a feeling of pity for the poor fellow who had trudged all the way through the rain because of some absurd notion that he was wanted. It had used to be like Dick to carry through in that same persistent fashion any service required of him. He had been faithfulness itself except for the occasional 'spree.'

'Come in,' said the deacon shortly, leading the way around to the back door. He was in sole possession of his home that night, for his wife and daughter were away on a visit; so he unlocked the kitchen door and presently had his unwelcome guest before a comfortable fire and provided with a cup of hot coffee. That was as far as his first kindly intentions had gone, but he was obliged to lengthen them considerably, for the rain, having trifled and coquetted all the evening, now settled to a steady downpour that forbade sending any one out into it. The deacon sighed, but he hunted up bed-clothing and arranged a cot in a little room opening from the kitchen. Dick beamed upon him, gratefully—a somewhat maudlin gratitude, it must be confessed.

'I'm your man, deacon—do whatever you say. Been looking for someone that wanted me all day, and couldn't get a job nowhere. Come as soon as I heard you was prayin' for me—quickest answer ever you got.'

Deacon Elliot left him to his heavy slumber, and went and sat down before his cheery fire. The quiet house, the flickering firelight, and the beating rain outside combined to make the hour one for thought, and he faced the question that had been slowly shaping itself in his mind. Was this man's coming an answer to prayer—to that petition which for thirty years he had been offering for 'the tempted and the drunkard,' and had never yet tried to answer himself? For he acknowledged, as he sat there, that he never really had tried. He had given a little money sometimes, he had gone to temperance meetings often, but he had never put forth any personal effort to rescue one who was down. This man, Melby, he had lectured, had censured, and, when he failed, had turned him off; he had never tried to shield him from his own weakness, or to help him to do battle with temptation.

It would be a long story to tell of the weeks that followed. Deacon Elliot found that he had a hard task upon his hands. He gave Dick work, and tried to watch over him, and, in doing so, learned as never before, how many pitfalls there are for stumbling feet. The regaining of manhood for one who had been a slave was slow; but there was gain as the weeks went by. Then, when Dick's family had been established in some tidy rooms not far from the Elliot home, the deacon stopped Jim when that young gentleman came into the store one day.

'See here, my boy, I understand that you sent Dick Melby to me that night he followed me home—told him I wanted him, and that sort of thing?'

Jim, who had been watching these weeks of experiment with much interest, some amusement, and a half guilty sense of responsibility, flushed and laughed.