

A SERVICE OF SONG.



ONLY the other day I met a man whose face and words sent my mind traveling back over the space of years to a little mountain hotel in Tennessee.

There had been an accident to the engine, and consequently my Cousin Agnes and I, who were journeying across the State, were delayed, like other unfortunates, in a village dreary and desolate.

The hotel partook of the character of the place. In the ill-smelling "parlor," to which my cousin and I betook ourselves, was a piano sadly out of tune. The only companion we had in that dismal place was an old lady, evidently a boarder there.

The wrinkled face which smiled from the depths of the large frilled cap was pleasant and refined, presenting, to my mind, the one relieving feature of the scene.

Outside it rained. This did not appear to interfere in the least with the comfort of the loafers who smoked under the "parlor" windows. Agnes, for want of occupation, sat down to the piano, which was very hoarse and occasionally sneezed inwardly. I cannot say that "Chopin's waltzes" sounded very natural, but "Old Hundred," which my cousin tried by way of contrast, appeared to give the old lady an idea. She had been watching the player with admiring eyes, and now she came over to the instrument and spoke.

"I was thinking, my dear," she said hesitatingly, "that if you could sing a little mite, just some old hymn or something, it would seem real good. Who knows but it might help some of them poor boys out there? They're most likely away from their homes and mothers, and it ain't probable they hear much good music—the Lord's music, you know."

Agnes looked at me inquiringly.

"It seems to me," I replied in a low tone, "rather an odd idea. I can't say that I should like your singing in such a place as this."

My cousin looked very thoughtful. "But, Ralph," if this is one of the little opportunities for service, such as we were speaking of last night, would it not be the right thing to do?"

"My dear cousin," I replied, "I do not see any probability of our doing helpful work by singing in this place, but do as you think best. No doubt the old lady would enjoy it."

"Won't you sing with us?" asked Agnes, turning and speaking to her, with the deference she would have shown to a queen. "My cousin and I will be glad to sing a little."

"Dear child," said the old lady, "I have no voice for music now. It was used up long ago. I'd love to listen to you, though."

I have never heard my cousin sing as she did that afternoon. The crowd at the windows laid aside their pipes and looked and listened. We sang together many familiar hymns of invitation and Christian thought, and Agnes sang alone the one beginning:

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and me.

Then came the refrain:

Come home! Come home!
Ye who are weary, come!
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

I confess I looked with surprise on the interest manifested among the group at the window. As the last sweet strain died away I noticed one young man, with a face better than most of those there, rub his rough hand quickly across his eyes. Almost immediately afterward the clerk of the hotel brought us the welcome news that the engine had been repaired, and that our train would start at once. The old lady followed us to the door with tears of pleasure in her eyes.

"You have done me good!" she exclaimed.

"And you have done us good!" Agnes replied quickly.

I said in the beginning that I recently met a man whose face and words sent my thoughts back to that time and place. He was an evangelist and a remarkable singer. He had just been singing with wonderful power, this very hymn.

"I well remember," he said, turning to us who were standing near him, "the first time I heard that hymn. It was in a miserable little hotel in Tennessee, where I had been squandering my substance—a real prodigal son. There came one afternoon into the building a little company of people who had been delayed in that forlorn place by a railway accident, and one or two of them began singing around the piano. The lady's voice I shall never forget. She sang one of my mother's old hymns, and then this one. 'Come home.' Wherever I went, the next few days, I seemed to hear that voice saying, 'Come home!' And the end of it was, 'I came.'"

"Not the end, sir," I said, reaching out my hand.

"How often we drop our little pebbles of service into the stream, and know not where the widening circles reach!"

Then I told him of the singers of that afternoon, and the only earthly one whom he had to thank—that dear old lady with the crown of snowy hair.

Congregationalist.