

Not many days after, Fred called to take me to his home for the anticipated visit. He drove a splendid team in a light spring wagon well adapted to the new country and somewhat rough roads. I could not but note his sturdy look, the health that glowed in his face and the strength that manifested itself in every movement of his body.

During the drive and at every opportunity in the home I studied his face. I was haunted by the thought that he had lost his faith, drifted from his moorings, given up his high ideals, and it worried me more than I would have been willing to acknowledge to him.

He had a fine farm, splendidly tilled, well stocked and a comfortable home. Financially, he had not lost anything by the change from the ministry to farming.

But why had he made the change? What had happened that Frederick Archer, the most zealous member of his college class, one of the foremost men of his divinity class, a successful minister for more than ten years, should have taken to farming when but little past forty years of age? He had made no mention of poor health, and I felt sure if that it was the reason he would have said so at once.

At supper, the first meal I ate in his home, he asked me to say grace. I wondered if he had given up the habit. How natural such a proceeding seemed to the children I could not tell, for my head was bowed.

The next morning after breakfast, the servant coming in for the time, he conducted family prayers. His tender prayer in which he thanked the Giver of all good for his care over us during our unconscious hours, and asked him to guide us during the day in such ways as would make us grow in spiritual things and increase our usefulness in the world, revealed a strong faith and a complete consecration to God. His hold on him "whom, not having seen, men love" was firm as of old. No, evidently Fred Archer had not drifted from his moorings.

All during that day, Saturday, I hoped he would say something about the reason for leaving the ministry. But he said not a word.

Sunday we attended upon divine services in the little church a mile away, where a young minister, just out from the seminary, preached, and where a Sunday school was conducted. Mr. Archer was the superintendent, and taught a large class of young men. It was easy to see that he entered into his work with heart and soul, and that he counted for more than an ordinary man in the work of the church.

Wednesday evening Mrs. Archer, Fred and myself drove to the prayer meeting. Again I discovered that my old friend with the same zeal for the cause, and his former joy in the work, so far as one could tell, was the moving spirit of the meeting.

Friday evening a company of young people gathered at his home for literary study. That hour opened with prayer. Following it came a half hour of social life, during which I noted the splendid influences of my former college mate over the young men of the circle. Surely he was doing good work, almost as good a work as though he were a regularly settled minister.

After the young people had gone and we were alone, we three, sitting before the open fire in which a big log glowed and crackled, I could stand it no longer.

You haven't told me yet why you left the active pastorate," I said. I used the phrase "active pastorate," for it seemed to me, the more I thought of it, that he was still in the ministry in the highest sense of the term.

"I left the pastorate," he answered, in his quite thoughtful way, "because I was a failure in it just as half the ministers are a failure."

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled and surprised. Startled and surprised, because he had the reputation of having been more than commonly successful.

"I mean," he went on, still in the quite, thoughtful way common to him, "that in all my ministry of more than ten years, in two parishes, I never did any work that would not have been done had I not been there. In both fields which I served there were four English-speaking churches three of which were uncalled for. Four of us were doing what one, or two at most, could have done better. That is one large, well equipped building, one strong organization, ministered to and cared for by two men, would have been far more efficient for the building of the kingdom for which Christ died, than the four poorly equipped buildings, the four weak organizations and the four men serving them."

"I suppose the two men would not have grown rich had they been given the combined salary of the four?" I suggested.

"I could get along on the salary," he went on after a pause, in which he looked intently into the fire, as though to read there what he should say, "for I was blessed with a wife who could make one dollar do the work of two, and who was sweet and patient through all trials and emergencies. But I could not stand it to think I was doing but a fraction of a man's work. It galled me to think that I, an able-bodied man, and three others, able-bodied men, should be trying to do with four poorly equipped churches, what two of us, with one well-equipped church and one united organization, could do far better. Why should I give my time and strength to doing part of a man's work?"

He looked up at me as though expecting me to answer. No answer coming, he went on. "I studied the fields in

which my class mates worked and sacrificed, and found the same difficulty. It seemed a common condition, one from which I could not hope to escape." Again he looked into the fire as though he would hear the still, small voice out from the crackling of the burning log, or see the divine writing in the flames that played back and forth, throwing strange shadows on the walls.

"One day I sat down to write a sermon on the Teacher's words, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.' Before I finished it, I knew that my days in that parish were numbered. Here was waste of the worst sort. Two out of four men were wasting their time, their lives; money that ought to have been put into one good building had been put into four, none of them worthy the work for which it was intended. What would have made one good choir was divided into four weak ones, and money that would have secured one good church organ had been given for four inadequate instruments. Men and women that would have made one strong corps of workers were divided into four discouraged groups, and people enough to have formed one inspired and inspiring congregation were split into four listless ones. But worst of all," and he sighed as he went on with his narrative, giving me an insight into his soul for which I thanked God, and laying bare the way by which he had been led, "worst of all, the world laughed at the spectacle, half despised us four ministers because we were doing but a fraction of a man's work each, noted the waste to which the churches seemed blind, and stood untouched by our ministry, by the work of the churches. Waste, waste, waste on every hand, and in every form. And the words came to me as from the lips of the teacher himself, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.' I seemed to feel the sorrow of his soul, the agony of his heart over the divisions in the ranks of his followers, and I vowed that I would work for him in some other manner, in some other field, anything rather than to be any longer a party to so sinful a waste of money, strength and worst of all, spiritual influence."

We sat quiet a long time, we three. The clock ticked away, the fire burned low, the crackling had ceased, only the strange shadows played upon the walls.

"You are satisfied with your decision, and your subsequent work?" I asked, no longer thinking of my friend as having left the ministry.

"Yes," he said, his face aglow, his voice full of joy. "The four churches of my last parish have been merged into one, splendidly equipped, ministered unto by two able, well-paid men. The church has an equipment so adequate, and is manned so splendidly by both ministers and laity, that it is a force for righteousness such as the four could never have been. Men are attracted who once stood aloof, and the young people of the town find their richest life and their highest joy in the church. The fragments have been gathered up, and the waste has been stopped."

"You feel you are of use here?" I asked, for his work in the home community had impressed me much.

"Yes," he responded, "I reach more young men in my Sunday school class and in the literary circle that meets at our house, than I ever reached in my pastorate. More young people from these two sources united with this church last year on confession of faith, than united with the churches which I served in any one year of more than ten years' pastorate. The work which I do in the ministry here is not such as will take a man's full time, but no one would do it should I leave it undone, and I have other work taking my time and energy: No one can point to me as a man doing only a fraction of a man's work, and that adds immensely to my influence, especially with the young men."

"Yes, he went on after another long silence, in which our thoughts went to the truth of what he had said as to waste in the work of the kingdom, the peace of God ringing in his tones, his very manner revealing his deep joy, "I'm satisfied with my decision."—Sel.

Christ Central.

BY HENRY ALFORD PORTER.

At a place near Jerusalem, called Golgotha, the soldiers have reared three crosses. And on these three crosses hang three figures, "and Jesus in the midst." Whatever motive put him there between those tortured victims, we cannot but feel that the position was the right one. The soldiers put him in the proper place. It was his place before; and has been his place since, and shall be his place when

The moon grows old, and the stars grow cold
And the leaves of the judgment-book unfold.

His central place in that death-scene is in keeping with his place in heaven and on earth. It is typical of his eternal attitude.

CHRIST IS CENTRAL IN THE UNIVERSE.

"Without him was not anything made." It was his hands that moulded the planets and set the stars on high. It was he that formed Orion and the Pleiades and sprinkled the star-dust over the milky way. Our sun is but a spark struck from the mighty anvil of this forger of worlds. He lifted the Himalays and the grand old Rocky mountains. I have looked with awe upon the white brows of thousands of snow-capped mountain peaks. He raised those eternal sentinels to their high places with a wave of his hand,

The name of Christ, the architect and builder, is stamped on everything that is.

And still he is the centre of the universe. "In him," writes Paul to the Colossians, "all things consist," that is, "hold together."

The universe would fall to pieces, all things would drop to nothingness were he to take his hand from beneath. He holds the reins of the universe. He keeps every star to its path and every comet to its course. He keeps the currents of life flowing in man and beast and plant. He is at the heart of all things. Somebody is managing the great ship of the universe. Have you found that out, and does it make you glad?

CHRIST IS CENTRAL IN THE BIBLE.

Open the Bible where you will and the face of Christ flashes out from the page. Go down whatever isle you please and you will come after a while to the manager of Bethlehem. "Christ is coming" is the refrain of the Old Testament, in whispered notes at first that you have to bend your ear close to the page to hear. The music swells into distinct melody as the figure of the coming King looms larger and larger on the horizon of time. It bursts into a diapason of triumph and grief in Isaiah and Malachi as they see the cross from the hill-top of prophecy. The key to the Old Testament is Christ. The key to the whole Book is Christ. It is his presence in it that makes it a "holy" Bible, a book unlike and beyond and above all other books.

I drove through the Garden of the Gods in Colorado. There were many objects of interest, weird and fantastic rocks, man-like, animal-like forms that one did not wonder to hear the untutored Indians came to worship. But there is only one thing for which I shall remember the Garden of the Gods. Approaching the great gateway to pass out, it was pointed out to me, but it was not necessary to point it out to me. There upon the face of the tall black rock had been traced in lighter color the profile of a stupendous lion, as true as to nature as if it had been drawn from life. Take that mighty phenomenon out of the gardens and there is little left for me. There are many things of interest and of profit here, but take out of the Bible, this garden of the Lord its central divine figure, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and there is little in it for me. Take him out and you have only the covers left. No Christ, no Bible.

Christ is central in the great plan of redemption. Trace back the stream of mercy and you find its source in him. Trace up every ray of hope that shines on man and you find it fall's from the Sun of righteousness. He is the ladder which Jacob saw by which man mounts to God. He put up the ladder despite men and devils who hurled the lightning and rolled the thunder against him. "I am the way," he cried and cries still. And there is no other way, neither church nor ordinances, nor human merit, nor any other way through the gates of salvation into the courts of praise but him.

An Autumnal Sermon and Prayer.

BY REV. D. O. PAKRER

"We all do fade as a leaf."

What makes the leaves so fair to-day,
Tomorrow, fall and fade away?
The worm, the frost, the storm and age,
Does each its chosen leaf engage?
And in its own peculiar way,
Remorseless, makes the leaf its prey.

The tender leaf upon the flower,
Oft comes and fades within an hour:
A worm has nipped the new born leaf,
Which made its stay so sadly brief,
An severed from its parent stem,
It fell to earth a faded gem.

The leaves we nursed and fondly cherished,
Within a night we've seen them perished:
When came the sunheat of the day,
Then all their beauty fell away.
The hoary frost on them was laid,
And ruthless made them droop and fade.

The leaves that on the branches hung,
Up where the robins perched and sung,
And seeming fit to live forever,
A wild and tempest blast did sever:
They fell and scattered all around,
Lie sere and faded on the ground.

When with goodbyes the summer's gone,
And autumn puts her glories on,
And purple robes the hill and dale,
And plenty comes from fields and vales,
Then ripe with age the leaves now fade,
And in their winter graves are laid.

And hence it comes, my text is true,—
The faded leaf to all is due:
The cradle yields its infant charms,
Torn rudely from its mother's arms;
And no discharge has youth or age,
The Jew or Gentile, saint or sage.

Great God who makes all nature bud and bloom,
Whose glory throws a halo o'er the tomb,
When comes our fading leaves and parting breath,
We lone'y cross the chilly stream of death,
O grant us then as now, sustaining grace,
In Jesus' love a peaceful resting place.

N. Springfield, Vermont, Oct. 1904.