

Selected.

THE DEVIL AND THE MINISTER.

"I can never finish it. I have not the heart to go on with it," said the minister aloud.

"Of course not," said a voice so near by that the minister was very much startled. But the minute he heard the voice he knew it was the Devil's. No one would ever mistake such a voice; and the minister, as he wheeled about in his chair and saw his visitor sitting on the edge of the table where the religious papers were kept, recognized his old enemy, and his heart sank lower than ever as he noted the triumphant sneer on the Devil's face.

"Of course not," he repeated, "especially when you know that more than half your entire membership are liars."

"What!" cried the minister, indignantly.

"Your church is full of liars," repeated the Devil calmly, "Let us see. You have a membership of three hundred?"

"Three hundred and fifteen," corrected the minister.

"Three hundred and fifteen. One hundred of them are men; seventy-five of them business men. All of them, when they joined the church, solemnly vowed to support the church services and love the church more than the world. Isn't that so?"

"It is," replied the minister anxiously.

"Now then," continued the Devil, triumphantly, "how many of these men ever go to the church prayer-meeting?"

"How many?" faltered the minister.

"Yes, how many?"

The minister made a rapid calculation, as his memory called up the appearance of his church chapel-room on prayer-meeting nights.

"About twelve."

"What!" cried the Devil, incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Maybe it is a little larger number than usual," the minister stammered.

"Well, never mind. Call it that twelve of your seventy-five business men attend the prayer-meeting regularly. The rest never come, or at least very seldom. How many of the women go to the prayer-meeting?"

"About forty or fifty," said the minister, brightening up a little.

"Forty or fifty out of two hundred. Say a possible sixty-five attend prayer-meeting out of a total membership of three hundred and fifteen. And yet all of them vowed solemnly to support the church in all its services. Minister, I said your church was full of liars. Isn't it so?"

"A good many of the members are so situated that they can't get out in the evening," groaned the minister.

"Did you ever know of any of them to stay away regularly from an entertainment or party if they were invited out on prayer-meeting night?" the Devil questioned, remorselessly.

The minister was silent.

"Did you ever know of any of your business men refusing to attend a political convention or a business convention because they hadn't time to go?"

Still the minister was silent. He had grown very pale and sad.

"I made a canvass, a while ago, of your church, and I found that more than half your members, preacher, spent an average of two nights a week all the year around in going to parties, receptions, or entertainments. When prayer-meeting night came, they said they were too tired, or something, to go. But if they could go to an entertainment, don't you think they could go to prayer-meeting if they wanted to?"

The minister made a gesture toward the Devil, almost as if he appealed to him to leave the study, but the evil one put his foot farther across his knee as if he intended to be more comfortable. In doing so he knocked the minister's favorite religious weekly upon the floor.

"Did you ever have half your church membership out to prayer-meeting at one time?" asked the Devil, ironically.

The minister smiled faintly. It was too absurd an idea to entertain for a moment.

"How large an Endeavor Society do you have?" asked the visitor, with a smile.

"About a hundred members in all—eighty-five active members." The minister looked apprehensively at the Devil, as he wondered what the question meant.

"Let's see. Your young people have a pledge or something that they take when they join, don't they?"

"Yes. What have you against that?" demanded the minister, half rising from his seat and speaking as fiercely as a minister ever has the right to speak.

"Nothing, oh, nothing," chuckled the Devil. "But isn't there something in the pledge about the Endeavor members going to the church prayer-meeting? Isn't the motto of the Endeavor Society, 'For Christ and the Church?' And doesn't the pledge say, 'I promise that I will make it the rule of my life to support my own church in every way, especially by attending all the Sunday and midweek services?'"

The Devil paused, and the minister added: "You have not finished the sentence in the pledge—'Unless prevented by some reason which I can conscientiously give to my Saviour.'"

"Exactly. I forgot that part of it. But now, Preacher, how many of your young people attend the church prayer-meeting regularly?"

"I don't know just how many," replied the minister, doggedly.

"Oh, yes, you do. Don't join the noble army of liars in your church. You know about how many of the young people attend."

"Forty or fifty, maybe," said the minister, but his voice sounded rather faint.

"Isn't that a high average?"

"Maybe it is," replied the minister, slowly.

"Isn't it true that not more than twenty-five or thirty of your eighty-five Endeavorers regularly attend the church prayer-meeting? Don't try to get out of it, Preacher. I've been to a good many of your meetings and enjoyed them. They are so dull and stupid, and it does me so much good to look around and see the empty seats and know that most of your people are somewhere else. But about your young people. Aren't they liars too? How much does their motto amount to? How much is their pledge good for?"

"Some of them have good reasons for not attending," the minister said, as he roused up a little.

"Reasons they could 'conscientiously give to their Saviour?'" asked the Devil, sarcastically, as he hitched himself farther over the edge of the table, knocking another religious paper on the floor.

The minister was silent. He was growing faint at heart as he reviewed the situation.

"Now, there was an average of one entertainment a week, last year," continued the Devil, contemptuously, which I noticed more than thirty of your Christian Endeavorers attended, even when it rained and stormed. I never saw one of these thirty Endeavorers at your church prayer-meeting. Do you think, Preacher, that going to these parties was a good reason to be given to the Saviour? Don't you think that your young people could keep this pledge if they wanted to? Don't you think they are really liars?"

The minister groaned and laid his head on his desk. He even put his hands over his ears so as to keep out the sound of his visitor's voice, but the voice penetrated his very heart as the Devil went on:—

"Preacher, your influence is far less than mine. I can get three-fourths of your church members to break their vows and attend the pleasures of the world instead of your church prayer-meeting. I can persuade nearly one-half of your Endeavorers that they do not need to attend the church prayer-meeting, even if they did promise in their pledge to do so. Don't you think the church is a failure? Don't you think the motto of the Endeavor Society, 'For Christ and the Church,' is a mockery? Don't you think your whole church is full of liars? Don't you think you would better resign and let me run the whole thing, seeing I have nearly all of it now? Don't you think organized Christianity is a failure after all?"

The minister was silent, but he dropped upon his knees in prayer. The next Sunday he preached a sermon which electrified his congregation, and produced wonderful results. The lesson conveyed should receive the careful study of every church member.—Charles M. Sheldon, in *Christ and the Church*.

PREPARATION FOR THE MARCH OFFERING.

If no careful preparation is made for the March Offering for Foreign Missions, little will be accomplished.

1 From now until March 4th, let there be much earnest prayer for the success of the work.

2. It will be well to make repeated announcements from the pulpit. The time of the Offering and its purpose should be clearly understood.

3. A copy of the *Missionary Voice* should be placed in each family represented in the church. Special attention should be called to its contents. It is loaded with the freshest missionary facts. It will help to generate missionary enthusiasm.

4. A *March Offering Envelope* may be placed in the hands of each member of the church, with the request to give a definite amount. We hope the church will undertake to average at least \$1.00 per member.

5. The work should be explained from the pulpit. The people want to know what fields are being cultivated; and the kind of work being done. They want to know the number of workers and where they are at work. It will be of great interest to tell the churches of the new fields Cuba, Hawaiian Islands and Philippine Islands; the character