

OUR MINISTER'S WIFE.

OUR minister is a favorite in the congregation, he is so approachable, so kind, so pleasant, so sympathizing. Every body likes him—the young and the old, the rich and the poor. And he's such an eloquent preacher! In all his private relations as well as his public ministeries, he seems as near perfection as can be hoped for this earth. Now this is saying a good deal for our minister.

But there is no unmixed good in this world. We are not permitted to enjoy our minister without the accompaniment of some unpleasant drawback. Mr. Elmore has a wife, and a minister's wife, it is well known, is not usually perfect in the eyes of the congregation. There was no exception to the rule in our case. Mrs. Elmore was no favorite. What the trouble was I did not know from personal observation; but no one seemed to have a friendly feeling toward her.

When I say no one, I refer to the ladies of our congregation. When Mr. Elmore was the subject of conversation you would be almost certain to hear the remark, "Ah, if it wasn't for his wife."

Or, "What a pity Mrs. Elmore isn't the right kind of a woman."

Or, "Isn't it a shame that he has a wife so poorly fitted for her position?"

So the changes rang. Mr. Elmore had been our minister for over a year, and during that time very little had been seen of his wife in a social way. The ladies of the congregation had called upon her, and she had received them kindly and politely, but with a certain distance in her manner that repelled rather than attracted. In every case she returned these calls, but, when repeated, failed in that prompt reciprocity which her visitors expected. There are, in all congregations, certain active, patronizing ladies, who like to manage things, to be deferred to, and to make their influence felt all around them.

The wife of our previous minister, a weak and facile woman, had been entirely in their hands, and was, of course, a great favorite. But Mrs. Elmore was a different character altogether.

You saw by the poise of her head, by the steadiness of her clear, dark blue eyes, and by the firmness of her delicate mouth, that she was a woman of independent thought, purpose, and self-reliance.

Polite and kind in her intercourse with the congregation, there was withal a coldness of manner that held you at a certain distance as surely as if a barrier had been interposed.

It was a serious trouble with certain ladies of the congregation, this peculiarity in the minister's wife. How he could ever have married a woman of her temperament was regarded as a mystery. He is so genial—she so cold; he so approachable by everyone—she so constrained; he all alive to the Church, and she seemingly indifferent to everything but her own family. If she had been the lawyer's wife or the doctor's wife, or the wife of a merchant, she might have been as distant and exclusive as she pleased; but for the minister's wife! Oh, dear! it was terrible!

I had heard so much said about Mrs. Elmore, that without having met her familiarly, or knowing anything about her from personal observation, I took for granted the general impression as true.

Last week one of my lady friends, a member of Mr. Elmore's congregation, called in to see me. I asked her to take off her bonnet and sit for the afternoon. But she said:

"No; I have called for you to go with me to Mrs. Elmore's."

"I have not been in the habit of visiting her," was my answer.

"No matter," was replied. "She's our minister's wife, and it's your privilege to call on her."

"It might not be agreeable," I suggested; "you know she is peculiar."

"Not agreeable for the minister's wife to have a lady of the congregation call on her! and my friend put on an air of surprise.

"She's only a woman after all, I remarked, and may have her likes and dislikes, her peculiarities and preferences, as well as other people. And I'm sure that I have no desire to intrude upon her."

"Intrusion. How you talk! An intrusion to call on our minister's wife! Well, that sounds beautiful, don't it? I wouldn't say that again. Come, put on your bonnet. I want your company, and I am going to have it."

I made no further objection and went with my lady friend to call on Mrs. Elmore. We sent up our names, and were shown into her neat little parlor, where we sat nearly five minutes before she came down.

"She takes her own time," remarked my companion. "If the tone of voice in which this was said had been translated into a sentence, it would have read thus:

"She's mighty independent for a minister's wife."

I did not like the manner nor the remark of my friend and so kept silent. Soon there was a light step on the stairs, the rustle of garments near the door, and then Mrs. Elmore entered the room where we were sitting. She received us kindly, but not with wordy expressions. There was a mild, soft light in her eyes, and a pleasant smile on her delicately-arching lips. We entered into conversation, which was a little constrained on her part; but whether this was from coldness or diffidence, I could not decide. I think she did not, from some cause, feel entirely at her ease. A remark in the conversation gave my companion the opportunity to say what I think she had come to say.

"That leads me to suggest, Mrs. Elmore, that as our minister's wife, you hold yourself rather too far at a distance. You will pardon me for saying this, but as it is right that you should know how we feel on this subject, I have taken the liberty of being frank with you. Of course I mean no offence, and I am sure you will not be hurt at an intimation given in all kindness."

I looked for a flash from Mrs. Elmore's clear, bright eyes, for red spots on her cheeks, for a quick quivering of her flexible lips; but none of these signs of feeling were apparent. Calmly she looked into the face of her monitor, and when the above sentence was completed, answered in a quiet tone of voice:

"I thank you for having spoken so plainly. Of course I am not offended. But I regret to learn that any one has found cause of complaint against me. I have not meant to be cold or distant; but my home duties are many and various, and take most of my time and thoughts."

"But, my dear ma'am," was answered to this, with some warmth, "you forget that, for a woman in your position, there are duties beyond the home circle which my not be omitted."

"In my position!" Mrs. Elmore's calm eyes rested in the face of my companion with a look of inquiry. "I am not sure that I understand you."

"You are the wife of our minister."

"I am aware of that." I thought I saw a twinkle in Mrs. Elmore's eyes.

"Well ma'am, doesn't that involve some duties beyond the narrow circle of home?"

"No more than the fact that your being a merchant's wife involves you in obligations that reach beyond the circle of your home. My husband is your minister, and as such you have claims upon him. I think he is doing his duty earnestly and conscientiously. I am his wife and the mother of his children, and as such I too am trying to do my duty earnestly and conscientiously. There are immortal souls committed to my care, and I am endeavoring to train them up for heaven."

"I think you misapprehend your relations to the Church," was replied to this, but not in the confident manner in which the lady had at first spoken.

"I have no relations to the Church in any way different from yours, or that of other ladies in the congregation," said Mrs. Elmore, with a decision of tone that showed her to be in earnest.

"But you forget, madam, that you are the minister's wife."

"Not for a moment. I am the minister's wife, but not the minister. He is a servant of the congregation, but I am not."

I glanced toward my friend, and saw that she looked bewildered and at fault. I think some new ideas were coming into her mind.

"Then, if I understood you," she said, "you are not interested in the spiritual welfare of your husband's congregation."

"On the contrary," replied Mrs. Elmore, "I feel deeply interested. And I also feel interested in the welfare of other congregations. But I am only a wife and a mother, and my chief duties are at home. If, time permitting, I can help in any good work outside of my home, I will put my hand to it cheerfully. But home obligations are first with me. It is my husband's duty to minister in spiritual things, not mine. He engaged to preach for you, to administer the ordinances of the Church, and to do faithfully all things required by his office. So far as I know he gives satisfaction."

"Oh, dear! yes, indeed, he gives satisfaction," was the reply to this. "Nobody has a word to say against him."

A smile of genuine pleasure lit up the face of Mrs. Elmore. She sat very still for a few moments, and then, with the manner of one who had drawn back her thoughts from something agreeable, she said:

"It is very pleasant for me to hear such testimony in regard to my husband. No one knows so well as I do how deeply his heart is in his work."

"And if you would only hold up his hands," suggested my friend.

"Help him to preach, do you mean?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" was ejaculated. "I don't mean that, of course." The warm

blood mounted to the very forehead of my lady monitor.

Mrs. Elmore smiled briefly, and as the light faded from her countenance, said in her grave, impressive way:

"I trust we are beginning to understand each other. But I think a word or two more is required to make my position clear."

"In arranging for my husband's services no stipulation was made in regard to mine."

"If the congregation expected services from me, the fact should have been stated. Then I would have communicated my view in the case, and informed the congregation that I had neither time nor taste for public duties."

"If this had been unsatisfactory, the proposition to my husband could have been withdrawn. As it is, I stand unpledged beyond any lady in the parish, and what is more, shall remain unpledged. I claim no privileges, no rights, no superiority. I am only a woman, a wife, and a mother—your sister and your equal—and as such I ask your sympathy, your kindness, and your fellowship. If there are ladies in the congregation who have the time, the inclination, and the ability to engage in the more public uses to be found in all religious societies, let them, by all means, take the precedence. They will have their reward in just the degree that they act from purified Christian motives. As for me, my chief duties, as I have said before, lie at home, and, God being my helper, I will faithfully do them."

"Right, Mrs. Elmore, right!" said I, speaking for the first time, but with a warmth that showed my earnestness. "You have stated the case exactly. When we engaged your husband's services nothing was stipulated, as you have said, in regard to yours, and I now see that no more can be justly required of you than of any other lady in the congregation. I give you my hand as an equal and a sister, and thank you for having put my mind right on a subject that has always been a little confused."

"She knows how to take her own part," said my companion as we walked away from the house of our minister. Her manner was a little crestfallen.

"She has right and common sense on her side," I answered, "and if we had a few more such minister's wives in our congregations, they would teach the people some lessons, needful to be learned."

I was very favorably impressed with Mrs. Elmore on the occasion of this visit, and shall call to see her again right early.

To think how much hard talk and uncharitable judgement there has been in regard to her, and all because as a woman of good sense and clear perception she understood her duty in our own way, and as she understood it, performed it to the letter. I shall take good care to let her view of the case be known. She will rise at once in the estimation of all whose good opinions are worth having.

We are done with complaints about our minister's wife, I trust. She has defined her position so clearly that none but the most stupid or self-willed can fail to see where she stands.

A Slow Train.

WE ARE frequently indebted to our friend Colonel Yard, of the Monmouth "Democrat," for anecdotes illustrative of the character of the peculiar people who live in New Jersey. He sends us this:

The Hon. G. T.—tells a good story of a slow railroad in the northern part of the State. He says he went there gunning, and came to a short line of road on which was run a single car, the forward end of which was partitioned off for baggage. He took his dog in the car with him and put him under the seat. Presently the conductor came along, and insisted that the dog should go into the baggage-room, which, after some altercation, was done; but here the baggage-master demanded a fee of fifty cents, which was denounced as a "swindle," a "put-up job," between the conductor and the baggage-master, and sooner than pay it he would tie the dog to the train and let him "work his passage."

The conductor assented, and the dog was hitched to the rear of the train.—The dog, so T— says, kept along easily with the train, but the conductor began to get uneasy, making frequent trips to the engineer, urging him to increase the speed of the train, and back again to watch the effect upon the dog. The latter began to show signs of fatigue, but after a while caught his "second wind," and was keeping along as before. The conductor now ordered the engineer to heave all the coal into the furnace and stir up the fire, which being done, the speed perceptibly increased.—The conductor again went to the rear to observe the effect, but the dog had disappeared, whereupon he triumphantly called T—'s attention to the fact.—The latter, after taking a glance at the situation, quietly pointed to a crack in

the floor of the car, "and there," says he, "was the dog, comfortably trotting along under the car, and licking the grease from one of the axle-boxes!"—Harper's Magazine.

"You'll Have to Stand?"

One time, Henry Ward Beecher went down to Boston to lecture. In the afternoon he went into a barber shop of great tone and refinement to be shaved. The barber was a garrulous little fellow who entertained Mr. Beecher, while he lathered his face, with intellectual conversation. He asked, "Are you going to the lecture this evening?"

"Oh," Mr. Beecher replied wearily, as a man who didn't take much stock in lectures.

"I don't know; who's going to lecture?"

"Woh," the amazed barber exclaimed, "Rev. Henry Ward Beecher; Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, of Brooklyn. Going to lecture to-night in Music Hall."

Mr. Beecher roused up a little with an air of indifferent interest. "Oh, well," he said "if he is going to lecture, I guess I'll have to go."

"Got your ticket?" the barber rattled on. "Got your ticket?"

"No," Mr. Beecher replied, "I have no ticket."

The barber laughed merrily. "Ha, ha, ha," he shouted. "You'll have to stand up! Seats all gone two days ago; you'll have to stand up!"

"Well, now," said Mr. Beecher, with an air of grave vexation, "do you know, that is just my luck? I was in Brooklyn last Sunday, went over to Plymouth Church twice, to hear that fellow preach, morning and evening, and both times I had to stand up all through the sermon."

And as he went away the still unenlightened barber laughed at the man who would have to stand up at Mr. Beecher's lecture.

A Touching Incident.

A lady in the street met a little girl between two and three years old, evidently lost, and crying bitterly. The lady took the baby's hand and asked where she was going.

"Down town, to find my papa," was the sobbing reply.

"What is your papa's name?" asked the lady.

"His name is papa."

"But what is his other name? What does your mamma call him?"

"She calls him papa," persisted the little creature.

The lady then tried to lead her along, saying:

"You had better come with me. I guess you came from this way."

"Yes; but I don't want to go back. I want to find my papa," replied the little girl, crying afresh as if her heart would break.

"What do you want of your papa?" asked the lady.

"I want to kiss him."

Just at this time a sister of the child, who had been searching for her came along and took possession of the little runaway. From inquiry it appeared that the little one's papa, whom she was so earnestly seeking, had recently died, and she, tired of waiting for him to come home, had gone out to find him.

The Biggest not the Bravest.

It is the first battle that tells the courage of the soldier. Many think before the battle that nothing can frighten them. When it begins they are panic stricken, and run in disgrace. Col. Chester, of Conn., who commanded a company of his townsmen at Bunker Hill, used to tell a good story of two of his soldiers in that battle. A large and powerful man standing by the side of a pale-faced youth of slender figure, said to the comrade:

"Man, you had better retire before the fight begins. You will faint away when the bullets begin to whiz around your head."

The pale stripling replied: "I don't know but I shall, as I never heard one, but I will stay and see."

He did stay, and was seen by Col. Chester during the battle, calm and firm, loading and firing with great coolness. But the burly giant by his side was missing, and at the retreat was found alive and unharmed, secreted under a haycock. Boastful words and moral courage to face any danger rarely go together.

Workingmen.

Before you begin your heavy spring work after a winter of relaxation, your system needs cleansing and strengthening to prevent an attack of Ague, Billious or Spring Fever, or some other Spring sickness that will unfit you for a season's work. You will save time, much sickness and great expense if you will use one bottle of Hop Bitters in your family this month. Don't wait. See another column.

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