

Some Adventures of a Travelling Secretary.*

BY ONE.

ANY one who travels about the country in the endeavour to secure contributions for some Christian work is sure to meet with many incidents, some pleasant, some sad; some comic, some grave. A few of these which have befallen the writer may be of interest.

It is no easy matter to go into a strange house and begin the attack. I generally glance round the room into which I am shown and look at the pictures and the books. I often find some face I know or book I am acquainted with which makes the approach easier. One day when walking in a Parish where I had been the preacher on Sunday I saw a beautiful house which seemed as if it might produce a contribution. I walked into the garden and had a little talk with the gardener. From him I learnt his master's name—I was thus able to ask for the gentleman by his name. I was shown in, and when he appeared my remark was, "I dare say you know my face." "Yes, I heard you preach yesterday." Thus the way was made easy to press still further the claims of the work. When I returned to the Vicarage the Vicar said he thought the Deputation was a bold man.

The question is sometimes asked, "Have you come begging?" The answer is often made, "I act on the principle, 'Ask God and tell His people.' I have done the one and now come to do the other. If on hearing of the work you like to give, well and good." Not infrequently the remark is made that this is a different way of putting the matter from that usually employed, and a contribution has been the result.

On looking through the Report of a Society a lady was seen to be a subscriber of £2 2s. to that Society. It was thought that she might be interested in the work in which I was engaged. When the house was reached, the address of which was found from the Directory, I thought I must have made a mistake. It looked so insignificant. However, as I was there I ventured to knock. The friend

* The writer of this article is Organizing Secretary of a Society for a large District. All the incidents are true, though names are of course omitted. The first person is used for greater convenience.

came to the door, not exactly dressed to receive visitors. When I showed my card with the name of my Society as well as my own she said, "Come in." I was shown into a front parlour, while she went to make herself more presentable. As soon as she returned and before I could say anything as to the object of my visit she remarked, "I see you want £10,000 for your Special Fund." "Yes, and we shall be glad if you will give it to us." She laughed and said, "I will give you something towards it." I then asked her how she knew about our wants, as I had not mentioned them to her. "Oh," she said, "I am an enthusiast about missionary work. I have read all about it." And I found that the dear Christian soul, who lived in only a small cottage, saved up until she was able to give in one sum £2 2s. a year to the Missionary Society in which she was interested.

One gentleman on hearing the object of the visit, said he would give neither a subscription nor a donation. Some picture on the wall suggested a remark; this was followed by another which drew from the gentleman an amusing story. This was capped by another. (And if you have got a man into a good laugh you have gone a long way to win his support.) I then said, "You will not give a subscription or donation?" "No." "Well, we are to hold a meeting for this Society to-night. Won't you give something to put into the collection? That will be neither a subscription nor donation." "Here's a sovereign for you." And each year when I called, almost before I said a word he would exclaim, "You have come for that sovereign for your collection."

In quite a different part a lady was mentioned as being both wealthy and generous. I called one day and found she was engaged. The butler said, "If you come to-morrow about 4 o'clock, you may be able to see her, perhaps." The next afternoon I was some considerable distance away and rain began to fall; should I trouble to go? I felt I ought to do so. I was shown into a beautiful drawing-room. When I stated the object of my visit, which was in reference to a Special Fund, the lady said, "I cannot do anything for you." In the course of conversation I told her of a gentleman who was engaged in a large and important business. He had promised to give to this same Special Fund £1,000 in five yearly instalments.

"Oh, you can give in that way, can you?" "Yes." "Well, I will give you £100." "Oh, thank you. I must put that down." So I got out my note book and began to write, "So-and-So will give

£100." "£100 a year for five years, you know." "Oh thank you," I replied. And to the day a cheque came each year until the £500 had been paid. I found out afterwards that the lady had come by her wealth in the same line of business as the gentleman whom I had mentioned, so that one could not have been led to a better illustration than that which was given.

This calls up another case where a refusal was changed to a gift. I was shown into the office of a gentleman. He was sharply reproofing a boy for some neglect in his work. I saw what sort of a man I had to deal with. On hearing the object of the call he said decisively, "I won't give you anything." I did not go at once, but took up another line of talk, and then came round once more to the subject in hand. He burst out, "I will give you £100 this year and perhaps another £100 next year." He gave the first, but was too much pledged to other Christian work to give the second £100.

A visit of a very different sort is the one now to be mentioned. A lady had been in the habit of giving an annual subscription to the Society. When I called in reference to the same I saw her brother. He said if she intended to continue it he would let me know. Not hearing anything for some time and being unwilling to lose the subscription I called again. The brother once more appeared. When he saw who had called, he immediately burst out in a torrent of angry words. He opened the door and almost thrust me out and then sharply closed the door. While I was still on the doorstep he opened the door again a little way and called out, "When you die they ought to put on your tombstone, 'And the beggar died.'" Some months afterwards I read in the newspapers that the body of this poor friend had been taken out of the water attired only in his night things. He had gone to stay with a friend who lived at some distance from his home. He got up in the night and threw himself into the water. Evidence was forthcoming at the inquest that there was insanity in the family, hence his outburst and his subsequent suicide.

The procuring of openings for sermons on behalf of the Society is often attended with difficulty. Understanding that a clergyman supported another Society very vigorously, it was thought that perhaps he might have sermons for the one I was furthering. I wrote to him. He replied, "The collections will be small. I cannot give you hospitality. Come if you like." I wrote to say I

would go. At the time fixed upon I went to the town and stopped at an hotel. On the Sunday morning I walked out to his church. He soon came in, limping from the effects of a fall. When I asked him how he was he dolefully replied, "Not very well." As it was a considerable way back to the hotel, he said, "You had better stay for lunch." I found he was a bachelor. We chatted at lunch. After lunch he turned round to the fire and lit his pipe and then remarked, "I feel better now. Here is something for your Society." The "something" was 10s. The collection was small, as he anticipated. The next year when I wrote to him, he said, "Come and stay with me." The collection was better, and improved again the next year. Eventually the church became, among all those visited, one of the most interested in the work of the Society. Soon after this I left that district for another. One Sunday morning in March a letter came to me. As it looked like a business communication it rested in my pocket till Monday morning. When dressing the letter was remembered. On opening it I read, "Dear Mr. —, I have received great blessings from God. I should like to give the enclosed cheque to the Society." I opened the cheque with considerable interest. It was for £100. It was the gift of the old bachelor. In August of the same year another letter came saying he was sending another cheque. Again it was for £100. And a year later another £100 came from the same kind donor. And when not long afterwards he died it was found that he had appointed the Society his residuary legatee. The sum received was not large, it is true, as he had, wisely, given away so generously in his lifetime. It was an evidence, however, of the way that deep interest in a good work sprang up from so unpromising a beginning.

When visiting another parish to preach, this time in Yorkshire, I was cautioned to be most careful how I stated the case, as the people were prejudiced against outside objects. Having received such advice the cause was set forth with great care. The collection proved to be fairly good. On Monday morning I visited a lady whom it was thought wise to interest further in the work. She remarked when she saw me, "You are, I expect, the gentleman who preached yesterday. I was not at church, but my husband told me about it. He went to church prepared to give a shilling to the collection, but when he heard what your Society was doing he gave £1." I often used that afterwards when pleading for the Society and urged

upon the people that if the work appealed in this way to a hard-headed Yorkshireman, there must be something in it. Not infrequently an increased sum was substituted for the amount originally intended to be given.

Thus it will be seen that the work of a travelling secretary has its ups and downs. It has, in fact, quite an exciting side. You wonder as you go forth, committing yourself and your cause to God, what kind of reception you will receive, what kind of success you will have. In almost all cases a kind reception was accorded and a courteous refusal was offered if a contribution could not be given. Very occasionally there has been such a rebuff that it has been necessary to say, "Sir, you are not bound to give, but you are bound to treat with the courtesy due from one Christian gentleman to another." Thus in this, as in all work for God, there are many things to humble the worker, while on the other hand there are others which send him on his way thanking God and taking courage.

