

irreverence, he wanted to turn the current of the conversation.

"But, surely," said Miss Clare, "a more active congregation would be quite as desirable."

She had one fault—no, defect: she was slow to enter into the humour of a thing. It seemed almost as if the first aspect of any bit of fun presented to her was that of something wrong. A moment's reflection, however, almost always ended in a sunny laugh, partly at her own stupidity, as she called it.

"You mistake my meaning," said Mr. Blackstone. "My chief, almost sole, attraction to the regions of the grave is the sexton, and not the placidity of the inhabitants; though perhaps Miss Clare might value that more highly if she had more experience of how noisy human nature can be."

Miss Clare gave a little smile, which after-knowledge enabled me to interpret as meaning—"Perhaps I do know a trifle about it;" but she said nothing.

"My first enquiry," he went on, "before accepting such an appointment, would be as to the character and mental habits of the sexton. If I found him a man capable of regarding human nature from a stand-point of his own, I should close with the offer at once. If, on the contrary, he was a common-place man, who made faultless responses, and cherished the friendship of the undertaker, I should decline. In fact, I should regard the sexton as my proposed master; and whether I should accept the place or not would depend altogether on whether I liked him or not. Think what revelations of human nature a real man in such a position could give me. 'Hand me the shovel. You stop a bit—you're out of breath. Sit down on that stone there, and light your pipe; here's some tobacco. Now tell me the rest of the story. How did the old fellow get on after he had buried his termagant wife?' That's how I should treat him; and I should get in return such a succession of peeps into human life, and intent, and aspiration, as, in the course of a few years, would send me to the next vicarage that turned up, a sadder and wiser man, Mr. Walton."

"I don't doubt it," said my father; but whether in sympathy with Mr. Blackstone, or in latent disapproval of a tone judged unbecoming to a clergyman, I cannot tell. Sometimes, I confess, I could not help suspecting the source of the deficiency in humour which he often complained of in me; but I always came to the conclusion that what seemed such a deficiency in him was only occasioned by the presence of a deeper feeling.

Miss Clare was the first to leave.

"What a lovely countenance that is!" said

my husband, the moment she was out of hearing.

"She is a very remarkable woman," said my father.

"I suspect she knows a good deal more than most of us," said Mr. Blackstone. "Did you see how her face lighted up always before she said anything? You can never come nearer to seeing a thought than in her face just before she speaks."

"What is she?" asked Roger.

"Can't you see what she is?" returned his brother. "She's a saint—Saint Clare."

"If you had been a Scotchman now," said Roger, "that fine name would have sunk to *Sinkler* in your mouth."

"Not a more vulgar corruption, however, than is common in the mouths of English lords and ladies, when they turn *St. John* into *Singen*, reminding one of nothing but the French for an ape," said my father.

"But what does she do?" persisted Roger.

"Why should you think she does anything?" I asked.

"She looks as if she had to earn her own living."

"She does. She teaches music."

"Why didn't you ask her to play?"

"Because this is the first time she has been to the house."

"Does she go to church, do you suppose?"

"I have no doubt of it; but why do you ask?"

"Because she looks as if she didn't want it. I never saw such an angelic expression upon a countenance."

"You must take me to call upon her," said my father.

"I will with pleasure," I answered.

I found, however, that this was easier promised than performed, for I had asked her by word of mouth at Cousin Judy's, and had not the slightest idea where she lived. Of course I applied to Judy, but she had mislaid her address, and promising to ask her for it, forgot more than once. My father had to return home without seeing her again.

#### CHAPTER XV.—A PICTURE.

THINGS went on very quietly for some time. Of course I was fully occupied, as well I might be, with a life to tend and cultivate which must blossom at length into the human flowers of love and obedience and faith. The smallest service I did the wonderful thing that lay in my lap, seemed a something in itself so well worth doing, that it was worth living to do it. As I gazed on the new creation, so far beyond my understanding,

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