

them the best I can. When I feel I may, I tell them what has done me good, but I never urge any belief of mine upon their acceptance.

"It will now seem no more wonderful to you than to me that I should remain where I am. I simply have no choice. I was sixteen when Mrs. Conan died. Then my friends, amongst whom Lady Bernard and Miss Harper have ever been first, expected me to remove to lodgings in another neighbourhood. Indeed, Lady Bernard came to see me, and said she knew precisely the place for me. When I told her I should remain where I was, she was silent, and soon left me—I thought offended. I wrote to her at once, explaining why I chose my part here; saying that I would not hastily alter anything that had been appointed me; that I loved the people; that they called me grannie; that they came to me with their troubles; that there were few changes in the house now; that the sick looked to me for help, and the children for teaching; that they seemed to be steadily rising in the moral scale; that I knew some of them were trying hard to be good; and I put it to her whether, if I were to leave them, in order merely, as servants say, to better myself, I should not be forsaking my post, almost my family; for I knew it would not be to better either myself or my friends: if I was at all necessary to them, I knew they were yet more necessary to me.

"I have a burning desire to help in the making of the world clean—if it be only by sweeping one little room in it. I want to lead some poor stray sheep home—not home to the Church, Mr. Walton—I would not be supposed to curry favour with you. I never think of what they call the Church. I only care to lead them home to the bosom of God, where alone man is true man.

"I could talk to you all night about what Lady Bernard has been to me since, and what she has done for me and my grandchildren; but I have said enough to explain how it is that I am in such a questionable position. I fear I have been guilty of much egotism, and have shown my personal feelings with too little reserve. But I cast myself on your mercy."

CHAPTER XXI.—A REMARKABLE FACT.

A SILENCE followed. I need hardly say we had listened intently. During the story, my father had scarcely interrupted Miss Clare. I had not spoken a word. She had throughout maintained a certain matter-of-fact, almost cold style, no doubt because she was herself the subject of her story; but we could read between the lines, imagine much she did not say, and supply colour when she gave only outline; and it moved us

both deeply. My father sat perfectly composed, betraying his emotion in silence alone. For myself, I had a great lump in my throat, in part from the shame which mingled with my admiration. The silence had not lasted more than a few seconds, when I yielded to a struggling impulse, rose, and, kneeling before her, put my hands on her knees, said, "Forgive me," and could say no more.

She put her hand on my shoulder, whispered, "My dear Mrs. Percivale!" and kissed my forehead. "How could you help being shy of me?" she said. "Perhaps I ought to have come to you and explained all; but I shrink from self-justification—at least before a fit opportunity makes it comparatively easy."

"That is the way to give it all its force," remarked my father.

"I suppose it may be," she returned. "But I hate talking about myself; it is an unpleasant subject."

"Most people do not find it such," said my father. "I could not honestly say that I do not enjoy talking of my own experiences of life."

"But there are differences, you see," she rejoined. "My history looks to me such a matter of course, such a something I could not help, or have avoided if I would, that the telling of it is unpleasant, because it implies an importance which does not belong to it."

"St. Paul says something of the same sort—that a necessity of preaching the Gospel was laid upon him," remarked my father; but it seemed to make no impression on Miss Clare, for she went on as if she had not heard him.

"You see, Mr. Walton, it is not in the least as if living in comfort I had taken notice of the misery of the poor, for the want of such sympathy and help as I could give them, and had therefore gone to live amongst them that I might so help them; it is quite different from that. If I had done so, I might be in danger of magnifying not merely my office but myself. On the contrary, I have been trained to it in such slow and necessitous ways, that it would be a far greater trial to me to forsake my work than it has ever been to continue it."

My father said no more, but I knew he had his own thoughts. I remained kneeling, and felt for the first time as if I understood what had led to saint-worship.

"Won't you sit, Mrs. Percivale?" she said, as if expostulating with me for not making myself comfortable.

"Have you forgiven me?" I asked.

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