

take of him, I put him down for a sovereign, or half-a-sovereign at the least. But I was disappointed; he also put down a shilling, and passed on. . . . The figure by my side made a mark in the scroll, and simply uttered the words, "The thoughtless man"—and I knew all about the matter. The man who had just passed me never thought a bit about the sermon, or about the wants of other people, or whether they had any wants at all; perhaps he might have given more, if he had thought; for he was not a stingy man. But what good was that? he did not do his duty now; the charity suffered; and I am sure, by the mark I saw the angel putting down, that he must have suffered himself.

The next comer at first greatly revived my spirits. On he came, and dropped a sovereign into my lap. "This," thought I, "is as it should be; now at length I am really going to work." I was inclined to look at the donor with pleasure, if not with admiration; and I was about to say to myself, "Surely the blessing of all these children, and this good cause, will light on him;" when, to my surprise, I perceived that he had the same vacant look as the thoughtless man who had given only a shilling; and, moreover, I saw the angel put the very same mark opposite his name.

I ventured, not exactly to remonstrate, but to say in an inquiring and puzzled tone of voice:—"Has not this man just given a piece of gold—the only piece I have as yet?" but he answered, "We never err—mark his face—you will see he meant nothing when he gave gold—no more than the other did when he gave silver—sovereigns and shillings sometimes only say the same thing." Then I remembered what the minister had said about a man's giving "according to his ability," and it was plain that this one had not done so; he thought no more about £1 than the other did about one shilling; and, in fact, looking at matters deep down in their realities, he might be said to have given nothing at all. I wondered whether people often thought how much sin there is in thoughtlessness, and how much loss to God's cause. . . .

Bad as these cases undoubtedly were, they were, not however, so bad, as some which now came under my notice. These persons were the "Artful Dodgers" of the congregation. . . . One man, who I saw looking about him in all directions during service, now came by me looking straight before him with his eyes as fixed as if they were made of glass. I saw him fix them just three steps away from me; and after he had passed me only two steps, I saw his head turn about just as well as ever; and in one of the turns, I saw that his eyes were all right again. At first I thought the poor man might have been struck by a sudden draught from the open doors, and got a crick in his neck; and though I lost his contribution, I pitied his misfortune; but I saw my companion mark him with one of those fatal marks, and this set me thinking. "Why," said I to myself, "is this?" Then the thought rushed all round me; "nothing is the matter with him at all. There are none so blind as those who won't see; it was just a trick to get out free." . . . Ever since that day, I know these men by the name of "Blinkers;" for they seemed to be like horses with blinkers to each eye, to make them look straight before them.

But I soon found out that in this, as in all other classes, there existed a considerable variety. These Blinkers did not all go out looking straight before them. Some kept so close to the people in front of them, that they slipped by almost unobserved; and one cunning fellow pretended to drop and catch at his umbrella; and he was off, and past me, in the very act. But it would be wearisome were I to catalogue the arts, devices, and dodges of this class. They used their handkerchiefs, just as if they had violent colds, at the critical moment of passing me; they were so busy buttoning up their coats, or tucking up their dresses, that they were quite preoccupied; just as if it were to this, and not to unwillingness to give, must be attributed their passing me by. I should often be amused at these petty mean arts, if I were not sad; and did I not see those ill-favoured marks continually recorded after their names. I have heard of small cheating going on in the world, but here, surely, was small cheating going on in the church; and I shall not pursue the subject any further.

Some people have the assurance coolly to bow or curtsy to the plate, and then pass out. I remember well one old lady of this kind who was the pink and perfection of good manners as she passed me by. She did not content herself with a mere familiar nod of the head, she held out her dress at each side, and gave me a grand salute; and, when her hands were thus employed, how could they be giving anything in

the plate? But this woman met one day with a rebuke which effectually cured her. She was a Scotchwoman, and lived at a boarding-house near the church, where there was another old Scotch lady also. Now the Scotch are what is called in the world "canny"; but I have found as liberal hands and as warm hearts among the Scotch as amongst any people in the world. Miss Macfarlane was one of those liberal warm-hearted souls, and it stirred her indignation greatly that Mrs. Mull should go out Sunday after Sunday in this way. At last she said to herself, "I'll speak; I'm determined I will, if she passes next Sunday." Well, next Sunday came, and Mrs. Mull passed me by with a grand salute. But Miss Macfarlane had watched her, and told that day at the dinner-table the story of a titled Scotch lady, who used always to pass the plate, till the elder on duty at the church-door went after her, and before all the people called out, "Laddy Betsy, less o' yer manners and mair o' yer siller!" That one sentence was as good as a sermon to Mrs. Mull, for whether she saw the absurdity of paying a hollow compliment to the plate, or whether she was really ashamed of herself, I cannot tell; but so it was, that she never passed me by any more. . . .

A whole shower of these Bowers were passing me, when I saw a few paces off a rather tall man, with plenty of dark whiskers, and on his arm was leaning a little woman—I will not say altogether fat, but comfortable-looking—with a fur boa round her neck, and stuffed into her mouth, for she was very wheezy in the winter; and with them was their only boy. The father's name was John, and the boy was known as "Jack"—that being John in a familiar sort of way. . . .

Mrs. Beacher would not have been at church this day, for she was still wheezy from the bronchitis, but that it was a collection-day; and this, which was the reason that many staid at home, or slipped off to neighbouring churches, was the very one why she came out. She was prepared not only to stuff that boa into her mouth, but even down her throat if necessary, rather than not be in her place on a collection-Sunday, if possible at all. True, she could have sent her contribution by her husband or little Jack, but that would not do for her. "Every empty seat," said she, "is a discouragement to the minister, and every person in his place helps to hearten him up; so I'll go to-day; I managed to go out to dinner without any harm a few days ago, and why should I not go to church to-day?"

Don't think, my friends, that these worthy people were rich, for they were not; they were just comfortably off; there were plenty of people in the congregation who could have bought and sold them over and over again.

As the gentleman came up to me, I saw him extend his hand, and immediately I felt something fall as gently as a snow-flake into my lap. But, unlike a snow-flake, it was warm and balmy; and, as soon as it touched me, a delicious warm thrill passed all round me, the like of which I had never felt before. Then the stout little woman with the beaming eyes dropped in two sovereigns; and the only son put in a shilling.

I saw my companion marking his scroll with what I knew to be happy signs; and the reason was plain enough. This £10 cheque was the fruit of thought, and the fruit of self-discipline; for the donor would not by mere nature have given so much; it was the fruit of a warm heart to what was good, and therefore it was of price. And the bright-eyed little woman!—she had thought of how discouraged the minister often was, at being left to find where he best could the means for carrying on his good works; and she felt it was a great thing, as she said, "to hearten him up;" and she did her best to bring about this desirable result; for she encouraged her husband to give, and she gave herself, and she taught Jack to give; and, to tell the truth, the contribution of this one little family made up full one-third of the collection. It might seem strange that so much should have been made of Jack's shilling, seeing that so many shillings have been spoken of with reproach; but there is a reason for this—it was his own—saved out of his pocket-money; and therefore real charity. I often think that parents are very much to blame for the want of charitable feeling in their children as they grow up. They give them generally a threepenny, or the smallest silver coin they can find to put on the plate; and so the child grows up (1) with the habit of giving the least coin possible; and (2) without any interest in the matter, for even that is not his own; and (3) he takes, and can take, no interest in what is going on, when the whole thing is such a form to him. Jack Beacher was taught to give out of his own money—always to