

persistent man in business,—“diligent in business” was the deacon’s own expression in justification of whatever neglect his own wife might chance to charge him with,—but it seemed to some business-men of the town, as well as to his own pastor, that the deacon’s diligence was overdoing itself, and that, in the language of one of the store-keepers, he had picked up a great deal more than he could carry. He was a director in a bank, agent for several insurance companies, manager of a land-improvement company, general speculator in real estate, and a man who had been charged with the care of a great deal of property which had belonged to old acquaintances now deceased. That he should be very busy was quite natural, but that his promises sometimes failed of fulfilment was none the less annoying, and once in a while unpleasant rumors were heard in the town about the deacon’s financial standing and about his manner of doing business. Still, Dr. Guide did not drop Sam Kimper from his mind, and one day when he chanced to be in the vicinity of Larry Highgetty’s shop he opened the door, bowed courteously to the figure at the bench, accepted the chair, and sat for a moment wondering what he should say to the man whom he was expected by the deacon to bring into his own church.

“Mr. Kimper,” said the reverend gentleman, finally, “I trust you are getting along satisfactorily in the very good way in which I am told you have started.”

“I can’t say that I have any fault to find, sir,” said the shoemaker, “though I’ve no doubt that a man of your learnin’ an’ brains could see a great deal wrong in me.”

“Don’t trouble yourself about that, my good fellow,” said the minister: “you will not be judged by my learning or brains or those of any one else except yourself. I merely called to say that at any time that you are puzzled about any matter of belief, or feel that you should go further than you already have done, I would be very glad to be of any service to you if I can. You are quite welcome to call upon me at my home at almost any time, and of course you know where I always can be found on Sundays.”

“I am very much obliged to you, sir,” said the cobbler, “but somehow when I go to thinkin’ much about such things I don’t feel so much like askin’ other people questions or about learnin’ anythin’ else as I do about askin’ if it isn’t a most wonderful thing, after all, that I’ve been able to change about as I have, an’ that I haven’t tumbled backwards again into any of my old ways. You don’t know what those ways is, I s’pose, Dr. Guide, do you?”

“Well, no,” said the minister, “I can’t say that my personal experience has taught me very much about them.”

“Of course not, sir; that I might know. Of course I didn’t mean anything of that kind. But I sometimes wonder whether gentlemen like you, that was born respectable an’ always was decent, an’ has had the best of company all your lives, an’ never had bad habits, can know what an awful hole some of us poor common fellows sometimes get down into, an’ don’t seem to know how to get out of. I s’pose, sir, there must have been lots of folks of that kind when Jesus was around on the world alive; don’t you think so?”

“No doubt, no doubt,” said the minister, looking into his hat as if with his eyes he was trying to make some notes for remarks on the succeeding Sunday.

“You know, sir, that in what’s written about Him they have a good deal to say about the lots of attention that He gave to the poor. I s’pose, if poor folks was then like they are now, most of them was that way through some faults of their own; because everybody in this town that behaves himself manages to get along well enough. It does seem to me, sir, that He must have gone about among folks a good deal like me.”

“That view of the matter never occurred to me,” said the reverend gentleman, “and yet possibly there is a great deal to it. You know, Mr. Kimper, that was a long time ago. There was very little education in those times, and the people among whom He moved were captives of a stronger nation, and they seem to have been in a destitute and troubled condition.”

“Yes,” said Sam, interrupting the speaker, “an’ I guess a good many of them were as bad off as me, because, if you remember, He said a good deal about them that was in prison an’ that was visited there. Now, sir it kind o’ seems to me in this town—I think I know a good deal about it, because I’ve never been able to associate with anybody except folks like myself—it seems to me that sort of people don’t get any sort of attention nowadays.”

The minister assumed his conventional air of dignity, and replied, quickly,—

“I assure you, you are very much mistaken, so far as I am concerned. I think I know them all by name, and have made special visits to all of them and tried to make them feel assured of the sympathy of those who by nature or education or circumstance chance to be better off than they.”

“That ain’t exactly what I meant sir,” said the cobbler. “Such folks get kind words pretty often, but somehow nobody ever takes hold of them an’ pulls them out of the hole they are in, like Jesus used to seem to do. I s’pose ministers an’ deacons an’ such folks can’t work miracles like He did, an’ if they haven’t got it in ’em to pull ’em out, why, I s’pose they can’t do it. But I do assure you, sir, that there’s a good deal of chance