

also. They had shown no consideration for him. They had made no allowance for his youth and inexperience, no allowance for his real anxiety to do good, about which there could be no mistake. They began to see that he was utterly deficient in that tact and readiness of self-adaptation which wins all hearts for men possessing but a moiety of his good qualities of head and heart.

As Ralph had not spared himself in his reflections, so now it was their turn for self-accusation. They had given him no chance. They had made overt attacks upon him in the local papers, they had put stumbling blocks in his way instead of going with him heart and hand in his work. The old singers even got up a complaint to the vicar, whose response, that he had perfect confidence in his curate, and could not interfere in his movements, was received as a fresh indignity.

The clergyman who officiated in Ralph's place, too, and who had once been curate of St. Peter's, had no bounds for his wonder and admiration at the change which his brother curate had effected in so short a time. The improvement in the appearance of the church, the music especially, which used to be so weary a ceremonial, and so sore a point of discussion, roused his enthusiasm in its praise. and the people now that it was pointed out to them, though they were at first quietly antagonistic, were struck with the actual improvement.

Ill! No wonder he was ill. Why, old Atwell said, who had it from the curate's own landlady, that he used to study so many hours every day, besides sermon writing, and working like a horse in the parish, and then there were the choral meetings which he presided over. And those sermons of his after all were wonderfully clever and deep. Think of the head work! And look at his ready generosity. They could hear of it now on all sides. And there was the harmonium, and the organist's large salary, all out of his private means. Why, not one man in a hundred would have done as he did. No wonder his health had given away.

#### CHAPTER IX.—PAST AND FUTURE.

HE sat alone in his lodging, weary with the pleasant languor, and hopeful. In its velvet cover lay the first sermon preached since his return, and the aspect of the room was the same as it had been on that evening long ago, when he sat there full of listlessness and despondency. But all was changed for him. Instead of fresh troubles, a new cordiality seemed to have risen up to welcome him back.

A deputation had waited upon him on the second evening after his return, to invite him to attend a meeting of the churchwardens and other parishioners, at which he was made treasurer of the sum already collected towards the new organ. Also a list was handed to him of those who proposed to become annual subscribers for the organist and choir. And a vote of confidence in him, and thanks for his untiring exertions amongst them was proposed and carried enthusiastically.

He was not prepared for this. His thoughts had been full of humility for his own shortcomings. His response breathed a spirit which they wondered they had never discerned before.

Inquiries for his health and rejoicings at his return met him on every side, and he was glad to get away from it all, back to the old lodging in Laura Place, that he might have space and breathing time to realize the change. He came back a quieter and happier man, with a secret joy that struggled to be uppermost, in spite of his assertions that he had not deserved it. In solitude and calmness he had taken to pieces his past life, and looked along it as a whole. He was prepared to begin afresh. He had suffered and could pity. His disgust for that part of his work which took him amongst the poor and wretched had vanished, for a shadow from the sweetest dream of his life fell on all those with whom henceforth he had to do. As for that pseudo-friendship of his, he saw it in its true