

HOME CIRCLE.

THE OTHER SIDE.

A TALK OF BUTTONS.

Breakfast was just over at the parsonage; the table was cleared away, the chairs set back, and Mrs. Ashton, in a neat morning dress, with a pretty little cap on her pretty little head, was standing with her arm over her tall husband's shoulder, looking at the morning paper. And as fine-looking a pair they were as you will be likely to see in a summer's day. The Rev. Clement Ashton was indeed said to be the handsomest man in the parish, and that with good reason; whether he had any ideas of his own on the subject was entirely his own affair.

Mrs. Ashton, as she was styled by the parish—Christiana, as her godfathers and godmothers named her—Chrissey, as her brothers and her husband called her—was not usually regarded as remarkably handsome. Her features were not very regular, and she was not fair; but her eyes, so bright and clear, her figure so elastic and trim, her abundant hair, and, above all, her frank easy manners, and the expression of sunny good temper and perfect openness which lighted up her face, made most people consider her a very attractive woman. Every one in the parish liked her, from the two old people who sat in the warm corner near the stove in the church, and always came round to get their dinner at the parsonage on Sundays, to Mrs. Dr. Rush, who was by far the grandest lady in the parish.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashton had been married about six months, after an engagement of almost three years, during which time they had corresponded vigorously, but had seen very little of each other, for Mr. Ashton was an assistant in an overgrown parish in one of our larger cities, and could seldom be spared; and Chrissey was a teacher in another great city, where she supported herself, and helped by her labours to educate one of her brothers for the ministry. It was not till this brother had finished his studies, and was placed on an independent footing, that she had consented to be married.

"George cannot support himself entirely," she said, in answer to the remonstrance of her lover; "he is not strong enough to labour as many of the young men do, and he needs my help. I know, too, that if he attempts any more than he is doing, his health will fail, and he will become discouraged. You must content yourself to board awhile longer with your good friend, Mrs. Bicketts, Clement."

And to this resolution she steadfastly adhered, despite Clement's persuasions, and those of George himself, who was very much distressed at the thought that his sister's marriage should be put off on his account. Under these circumstances, the lovers did not see much of each other, and they were finally married without Chrissey's ever having suspected her husband of any infirmity of temper. She had suffered much on discovering that such was the case, and felt inclined sometimes to wish that she had never been disenchanted. But she was a wise woman; she knew her husband's intrinsic excellencies and strength as well as his weakness, and altering an old maxim to suit her own purpose, she resolved both to endure and cure.

"What do you set about to-day?" she asked, as Mr. Ashton, having exhausted the paper, arose from the sofa corner.

"Visiting," replied his reverence. "I must go up to old Mrs. Balcomb's and see the Joneses, and try to prevail on Phil Taggart to let his children come to the Sunday school once more. Then I have to see poor Maggie Carpenter, who is much worse again, and if I have time, I shall get into the omnibus and ride out to the mills, to that girl Miss Flower mentioned to me yesterday."

"What a round!" exclaimed Chrissey. "You will never get home to dinner at two o'clock. I think I will put it off till six, and run the risk of being thought 'stuck up,' like poor cousin Lilly."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you know they always dine at six to suit the doctor's arrangements. One day Lilly called about some society matter on a lady who lives not a hundred miles from her street, about five o'clock in the afternoon. The lady herself came to the door, and Lilly was about entering, when she thought she perceived the smell of roast meat in the hall, and said very politely, 'But perhaps it is your dinner hour!'"

"No indeed!" replied madame, with indignation. "We don't dine at this time of day; we are not so stuck up!"

"Poor Lilly!" exclaimed Mr. Ashton, laughing, "what did she say?"

"O! she did her errand, and retired, of course. There was nothing to be said."

Mr. Ashton turned to go into the study, and as he did so, his foot caught in the carpet and he was nearly thrown down. Chrissey started in alarm, but he recovered himself, and said pettishly enough—

"I do wish you would have that carpet nailed down. I have stumbled over it twenty times in the course of a week, I do believe."

"I thought Amy had fastened it," returned his wife, with perfect mildness. "I am sure I saw her at work there. The door must pull it out of place, I think."

"O! of course there is some excellent reason for its being out of order. It seems to me that, with all your ingenuity, you might find some way of making it more secure."

He turned into his study, shutting the door after him with rather unnecessary force, and Mrs. Ashton returned to the fire and arranged her work-basket for that day, with something of a cloud on the fair face. She was not left long here undisturbed, for Mr. Ashton's voice was soon heard calling her in impatient tones. She sighed, but arose and entered the next room, where she found her husband standing before his bureau partly dressed, and with shirts, cravats, and handkerchiefs scattered about him like a new kind of snow, while his face bore an expression of melancholy reproach at once painful and slightly ludicrous.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"O, the old story! Not a button where it ought to be! not a shirt ready to wear! I do not mean to be unreasonable," he continued, in an agitated voice, as he tumbled over the things, to the manifest discomposure of the clean linen, "but really, Chrissey, I think you might see that my clothes are in order. I am sure I would do more than that for you; but here I am delayed and put to the greatest inconvenience, because you cannot sew on these buttons! I should really think that a little of the time you spend in writing to George and Henry might as well be bestowed on me."

This address was delivered in a tone and manner of mournful distress, which might have been justified, perhaps, if Mrs. Ashton had picked his pocket as he was going to church.

"What is the matter with this shirt?" asked Chrissey, quietly examining one of the discarded garments. "It seems to have all the buttons in their places; and this one, too, is quite perfect; and here is another. My dear husband, how many shirts do you usually wear at a time?"

"O! it is all very well for you to smile, my love, but I do assure you I found several with no means at all of fastening the wristbands. We had breakfast late, and now I shall be detained half an hour, when I ought to be away. I know you mean well, but if you had served a year's apprenticeship with my mother before you were married, it might have been all the better for your housekeeping."

"It might have prevented it altogether," was repressed in a moment. She picked up and replaced the scattered apparel, folded the snowy cravats, warmed her husband's overshoes, and saw the beautiful little communion service, presented by a lady of the parish, and consecrated to such sufferers as Maggie Carpenter, was in readiness. Before he left the house, Mr. Ashton had forgotten both his fretfulness and its cause. He kissed his wife, thanked her for her trouble, proposed that she should send for Lilly to spend the day with her, and strode away with his usual elastic step and pleasant face.

Chrissey watched him from the door till he turned into the next street, and then went back to the fireside and to her own reflections.

This fretfulness and tendency to be greatly disturbed at little matters, was almost her husband's only fault. He was self-sacrificing to the last degree, faithful and indefatigable as an apostle in almost all his professional labours, liberal to a fault, and in his administration of parish matters wise and conciliating to all. He could bear injuries, real injuries, with the greatest patience, and was never known to harbour resentment.

But with all these good qualities, Mr. Ashton had one fault—a fault which threatened to disturb and

finally to destroy the comfort of his married life. If his wife, by extravagance or bad management, had wasted his income and involved him in difficulties, it is probable that he would never have spoken an unkind word to her; but the fact of a button being missing, or a book removed from its place, would produce a lamentation half indignant and half pathetic, which rung in Chrissey's ears, and made her heart ache long after Clement had forgotten the circumstance altogether. Strange as it may seem, Mr. Ashton had never thought of this habit, of which, indeed, he was but imperfectly conscious, as a fault.

He thought, indeed, that it was a pity he should be so sensitive, and sometimes said that he wished he had not such a love for order and symmetry, for then he should not be so often annoyed by the disorderly habits of other people. He said to himself that it was one of his peculiar trials—that even Chrissey, perfect as she was, did not come up to his ideas in this respect; but that his peculiar trials, as he was pleased to call them, ever became trials to other people, he did not imagine. He had, indeed, remarked, in spite of himself, that Chrissey's face was not as cheerful, nor her spirits as light, as when they were first married; and he regretted that the cares of housekeeping should weigh so heavily upon her; but nothing was further from his thoughts than that anything in himself could have produced the change.

Mr. Ashton, exhausted with his day's work, turned towards home with his mind and heart full of all he had seen and felt. He said very little during dinner, but when the table was removed, and he sat down in his dressing-gown and slippers before the fire, he related to his wife all the events of the day, describing, with the enthusiasm of his earnest nature, the patience and holy resignation he had witnessed, and ended by saying—

"Certainly religion has power to sustain and console, under all trials, and under every misfortune."

"Except the loss of a button," replied Chrissey, seriously. "That is a misfortune which neither philosophy nor religion can enable one to sustain."

The Rev. Mr. Ashton started as though a pistol had been discharged at his ear.

"Why, what do you mean, Chrissey?"

"Just what I say," returned Chrissey, with the same soberness. "Yourself, for instance; you can endure with the greatest resignation the loss of friends and misfortune; I never saw you ruffled by rudeness or abuse from others, or show any impatience under severe pain; but the loss of a button from your shirt, or a nail from the carpet, gives you a perfect right to be unreasonable, unkind, and—I must say it—un-Christian."

Mr. Ashton arose, and walked up and down the room in some agitation.

"I did not think, my love," he said at last in a trembling tone, "that you would attach so much importance to a single hasty word. Perhaps I spoke too quickly; but even if it were so, did we not promise to be patient with each other's infirmities? I am sure I am very glad to bear with—"

Mr. Ashton paused; he was an eminently truthful man, and, upon consideration, he really could not remember that he had ever had anything to bear from his wife.

"If it were only once, my dear husband, I should say nothing about it; but you do not in the least seem aware how the habit has grown upon you. There has not been a day this week in which you have not made my heart ache by some such outburst of fretfulness."

Mr. Ashton was astonished; but as he began to reflect, he was still more surprised to find that his wife's accusation was quite true. One day, it had been about the front-door mat, the next about a mislaid Review, and then about a lost pair of gloves, which after all were found in his own pocket. He felt that it was all true; and as his conscience brought forward one instance after another of unkindness, he sat down again and covered his face with his hands.

"But that is not the worst," continued Chrissey, becoming agitated in her turn. "I fear—I cannot help fearing—that I shall be led to feel as I ought not towards you. I fear lest I shall in time lose the power of respecting my husband, and when respect goes, Clement, love does not last long. This very moment I found myself wishing I had never known you."

Chrissey burst into tears, a very unusual demonstration for her; and Clement springing up, once more