

of those gathered in His name, to hear and answer the petitions. If this is true, then no earthly ruler was ever so neglected and insulted, so generally ignored as this very Deity to whom you ascribe unlimited power, and from whom you say you receive life and everything. An eastern despot would take off the heads of those who treated him in such style, and a republican politician would scoff at the idea of giving office to such lukewarm followers. Why here in Christian Chicago the will of God is no more heeded by the majority than that of the Emperor of China, and the Bible might as well be the Koran. Looking at these facts from my impartial standpoint, I am driven to one of two alternatives: either you regard your God as so kind and good, so merciful, that you can trespass on His forbearance to any extent, and treat Him with a neglect and indifference that none would manifest toward the pettiest earthly potentate, and still all be well, or else you have no real practical belief in your religion. Though not very charitably inclined, I cannot think quite so meanly of human nature as to take the former view, so I am driven to the latter. For surely no man who wished to live and prosper, no woman who loved her husband and children, could so coolly and continually disregard the Deity in whom they profess to believe with the old Greek Poet, they "live, move, and have their being."

The twilight deepened, and Christine continued, her words portraying the decline of faith according, ominously with the increasing gloom.

"Why, in order to see the truth of what I am saying, look at the emblem of your faith—the Cross. All its historical associations are those of self-denial, and suffering for others. The Founder of your faith endured death upon it. He was a great good man like Socrates, though no doubt a mistaken enthusiast. But what He meant, He said plainly and clearly, as for instance, 'Whosoever doth not bear His cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.' I admit that in the past He had a wonderful following. In the ages of martyrdom multitudes left all and endured all that He did for His sake. But so there have been other great leaders with equally devoted followers. But in this practical age religious enthusiasm has but little chance. What crosses do the members of the Church of the Holy Virgin take up? and what are borne by your great rich church, Miss Winthrop? The shrewd people of this day manage better, and put their crosses on

top of the church. I suppose they reason that the stone tower can carry it for the whole congregation on the principle of a labor-saving machine. But honestly your modern disciples are no more like their Master than one of the pale, slim, white-kidded gentlemen who will be here to-night, is like Richard Cœur de Lion as he led a charge against the Moslems. Your cross is dwindling to a mere pretty ornament—an emblem of a past that is fast fading from men's memories. It will never have the power to inspire the heart again, as when the Crusaders—"

At that moment their eyes were blinded by a sudden, dazzling light. There was a general and startled exclamation, and then, awe-struck and silent, they gazed as if spell-bound upon a luminous cross blazing before them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EQUAL TO AN EMERGENCY.

The fiery cross that so awed Christine and her little group of auditors, was to be the closing scene of the evening entertainment. It was of metal, and by a skilful adjustment of jets was made to appear as if all aflame. While the others were intent on Christine's words, and she in the interest of her theme had quite forgotten him, Dennis made all his arrangements, and at the critical point narrated in the preceding chapter, he turned on the gas with the most startling effect. It seemed a living, vivid refutation of Christine's words, and even she turned pale. After a moment, for the emblem to make its full impression, Dennis stepped out before them all, his face lighted up by the luminous cross. They admitted that no Crusader could look more earnest and brave than he.

"Miss Ludolph," he said in firm yet respectful tones, "I should evermore be unworthy of your respect and confidence, what is more, I should be false to myself, false to my faith, should I remain silent in view of what I have been compelled to hear. That sacred emblem has not spent its meaning, or its power. Millions to-day would die for the sake of Him who suffered on it. Many even of those weak, inconsistent ones that you have so justly condemned, would part with life rather than the faint hope that centres there," pointing to the radiant symbol.

"You are rude, sir," said Christine, her face pale, but her eyes flashing in turn.

"No, he is right! he is right!" exclaimed