

"Yes?" said Ralph, interrogatively.

"As it is, I fear there will be serious objections to having a large-salaried organist thrust upon——"

"I shall be able to defray expenses also," interrupted Ralph, haughtily; "all that I can do, I will do. I have been accustomed to see the Church services conducted with reverence and order, and since the parish will not help me, since the people of St Peter's have nothing to spare for the Church, I can only be thankful that the means have been given me to make such improvements as I may judge necessary."

Mr. Smith went away angry and offended. The ministry of the new curate amongst them seemed to be a sort of "progression by antagonism." What it would end in remained to be seen, but certainly every word he uttered drove the wedge in farther, and widened the chasm which he had chosen to open between himself and his parishioners.

As for Ralph, in great access of bitterness, he threw open the little window looking upon the court—the Devil's Court, as it was called—and leaned out watching the pig piston at its work, and hearing the snatches of nursery rhymes from the kitchen. If people choose to say one thing when they meant another, was he to be blamed for believing them? Besides, he really could not see the reason for taking offence at what he had done. He was bound to act as he thought right, and if that did not please, it was no fault of his. He was not going to give way an inch to anybody's prejudices. He must maintain his authority, that is the authority of his office, and no one had any right to cavil at his proceedings. He would set the matter on one side entirely, and trouble himself no further about it. And forthwith he returned to the labours of study and composition, which the church-warden had disturbed.

Alas! his mind was crammed with the learning drawn from books; but the thoughts of others had not as yet helped to a right understanding of his own; and of the hearts of men and women he knew comparatively nothing. Neither had he a particle of that valuable attribute, tract.

By and by an interruption came to his studies. A note was brought to him; it was from the rich Mr. Smith.

The church-warden had probably repented of his anger. The meagre aspect of the curate's room recurred to him again and again; the man who not wanting means, could be content to live in that style after Repton Chase was, probably eccentric, and therefore to be pitied—for Mr. Smith knew and was well known at Repton. He had known Ralph as a little boy, and had held him on his knee—a fact of which it would have been daring to remind the haughty curate. It was a fact, nevertheless, which made the curate's authoritative manner and self-assertion harder to bear. In spite of himself, however, the church-warden could not help a feeling of respect for the readiness with which a young fellow like Ralph took upon his own shoulders an expense which of right belonged to the parish.

Mr. Smith was about to give a dinner party, to which, with an intimation that certain members of the Archaeological Society would be present, he bade Ralph—not with a formal invitation, but with the more cordial note written in the first person, and conveying in it a delicate forgetfulness of the recent misunderstanding.

Mr. Smith's parties were notoriously the best in the parish, and besides Ralph, having once looked with interest over his collection of Roman pottery,