

"I don't see how I can help it if I don't have room enough," said Ida.

"All the more need of system, my child. But let us see how much room you need. Take everything out and we will rearrange the drawer."

"Out they came on the bed. There was a good deal of rubbish, soiled robes, frayed collars, handkerchiefs that belonged in the laundry bag, scraps of paper covered with algebra examples, Latin exercises, and the like. They made together a big pile at the foot of the bed. Ida was quiet and I think ashamed. Then we put back just what belonged in the drawer, some things in boxes, some folded neatly in piles. It took us a good half hour, but when we finished Ida said:

"What a difference it makes, mamma. Throw away the rubbish and arrange what there is left with some system, and there is plenty of room. I'll see how long I can keep it as nice as it is now."

"I was encouraged, as I always was when the good resolutions were made. That night I was unusually tired from extra cleaning and sewing, but I could not sleep. Everything that had occurred through the day kept coming up in my mind. I thought about Ida, and wondered if she really would grow more orderly. I hoped that I could be wise and patient in dealing with her; and then I thought of the missionary meeting which was to be next day, and wondered if I ought not to go. I hadn't been present for at least five months; perhaps it had been longer; I wasn't sure. 'Why had I been absent so long?' something seemed to say, almost sternly. I went over, sleepily, all my old arguments: Can't do everything; it would be different if we were rich and kept a servant to relieve me. Then one day it had rained; then I had had a good deal of extra company. How could I belong to the sewing society and missionary society and keep my house neat and sew and attend to it properly? It was surely too much to expect. Why, though, must I be bothered by this uncomfortable feeling? If it were right for me to stay home, why was not the question settled—why must it constantly vex me, me, Mrs. Ashmead, who every one knew tried to do her duty and her share of everything? At any rate, I kept my dues paid promptly, and I tried to console myself with that thought.

"Dues are not you, dues are not you," seemed to sound in my ears.

"Well," I said, "there is plenty to do for the heavenly right in our own land."

"Our society was for home and foreign missions, and I, with a number of ladies, had often said that we believed most thoroughly in home missions. O, how I did approve of home missions! Look out first for your neighbors," I had said. Yet if my interest in home missions was so deep, why didn't my zeal show itself by giving a part of one afternoon in the month to the meeting? Mrs. Hamilton tried to be fair in arranging the programme so that both the home and foreign fields were equally represented; and was it possible that I couldn't endure a little of the foreign for the sake of what I claimed (or tried to) was near to my heart?

"At last I fell asleep. Such a strange dream as I had—I can never forget the impression it made on me. An apparition, like a man dressed in a long, dark robe, approached, and said slowly and distinctly, 'Come with me.' I was almost startled by his peremptory and unnatural manner, but there was nothing to do but obey."

"I arose and quickly followed him. On and on we went, it seemed for hours, yet I felt no fatigue. At length we entered into a large, empty room. It was very large—miles in length, I thought. The sides were completely lined with bureaux."

"What does this mean?" I asked.

"Hush," said my guide; "ask no questions; all needed information will be given you."

"I noticed that the bureaux were high and full of drawers. Some of these were closed; some partly shut, and others wide open. A strange, unnatural feeling came over me. I was so impressed with the immensity and stillness of the room that I turned, saying faintly to the guide:

"I—I think I will go home."

"He smiled and said: 'Not yet, not yet.'"

"Then I found that I could not have gone had I tried. No door of exit was in sight. But the smile brought reassurance, and all desire to leave had gone. I seemed to be in another and a new sphere of life, yet felt no longer any fear."

"These drawers," said my guide, "are the lives of God's creatures. Each bureau represents a family, each drawer a human life. Some, as you see, are closed, never to be opened in this life. Others are nearly closed, which means that the Master's coming is near at hand. Those that are wide open are in the morning or noonday of their earthly stay. If you walk about and examine the contents you can see the character of each life. The reputation is what you can see from here—the outside. Look about before we take our tour of inspection."

"Tour of inspection!" Where had I heard that before? Why, those were the very words I had so often used to Ida. What Ida? Everything seemed far away, but soon my mind cleared. I looked carefully from where I stood at the outside of these drawers. I felt something impelling me to do this. Some were beautiful—smoothly polished and without a scratch on the surface. Others were marred by careless usage, varnish rubbed off, knocks here and there that had taken more than the varnish—they had made deep dents in the wood;

"It is not very difficult," said my guide, "to keep the outside, the reputation, as good as new. Only be a little careful not to get the varnish off, for it's hard to get it back to look like new; and as for these dents that you see, they are deep and always are likely to show. There is a kind of filling that has often been used, and it makes the surface so like the original that often the place of the dent is seen only by looking closely. In certain lights, though, the scars cannot be hid and the sham filling stands out plainly. You'll notice that you can't always tell from the outside how the drawer will look when you get to see into it. Some of the best polished and handsomest ones are really the worst ones of all. Now, we'll