

CHARLES TRISTAM, MISSIONARY.

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CHAPTER IV.

S EVEN years have passed since the events narrated in the last chapter. Charlie Tristam, although still by no means robust, had developed into a tall, well-built youth.

To his parents these years had made but little difference, except perhaps, in their love and affection for him which they had deepened and intensified. He was worthy of it all. The old look of gentleness had not left his fair face, only there was added thereto an expression betokening a more matured thoughtfulness than as a boy he could hardly have possessed. This feature, so far from lessening, had served only to increase greatly the attractiveness of his countenance, if not in the eyes of his affectionate parents, who regarded it as an ill omen; at least so it seemed to Vicar Maitland, who still guarded the spiritual interests of Brinkworth. Ever since that memorable Sunday afternoon, of which we spoke quite fully in the preceding chapter, that look of thoughtfulness had become more and more marked as the years of Charlie's life sped on. His interest in the missionary work of the Church, which then began, continued unabated; indeed he was always doing something for missions. In his private prayers, whether at home in the solitude of his chamber, or in the midst of the congregation gathered around the altar, his chief petition ever was that God would be graciously pleased to make him an instrument in His hands, of pointing those who knew him not, to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." The consuming desire of his life was expressed in this petition. To his parents he spoke but little of this desire; only ever and anon a word or a sentence would fall from his lips, or a look would sit upon his face, which told them full plainly of the ardor which filled his breast. He was now just eighteen years old, and he began to be much impressed with the consciousness that the time had come for him to decide as to his future course of life. He knew well enough that his father would be opposed to his leaving home. He was not very strong, and he was an only child; it would be better that the threefold cord which bound the parents to each other and to their son should not be voluntarily severed by any of them. Such musings as these, although not frequently expressed, yet very often insinuated by Mr. Tristam, Charlie knew had taken a firm hold of his father's mind; as for his mother he felt that for her the bare idea of a separation would be terrible. The knowledge of all this was a source of continued anxiety to our hero, and he prayed earnestly that the Lord would make his way plain before his face. After weeks of fervent prayer and careful deliberation, he at length arrived at a decision with regard to his immediate duty; this, he thought, was plain. He would con-

sult Mr. Maitland, and having obtained his advice, which he knew from a happy experience, would be the wisest and best, he would endeavor earnestly to follow, though it were ever so hard. Accordingly, having previously arranged time and place Charlie met the vicar in the latter's study.

"My wish is, as you are aware, Mr. Maitland," began Charlie, "to join the Central African Mission; but of course I know that father and mother will not hear of such a thing. They will offer much opposition to it I am sure."

"My son," replied the vicar, "you need not to be reminded that children are bound by the most solemn obligations to obey their parents in all things, that is as I take it, so long as the carrying out of their behests is consistent with the will of God. Have you acquainted your parents with your wish?"

"They are not aware of my possessing any particular preference as to the sphere of my future labors, but that my mind has been for a long time set upon becoming a missionary I feel sure they know, although I must tell you truthfully, I have always hesitated to tell them plainly of it chiefly on my dear mother's account."

The lad's thoughtful consideration for his mother struck the vicar very forcibly, although he had always admired this prominent trait in his character. But he felt that it was Charlie's obvious duty to acquaint the squire and his wife of his wish, and so he concluded, "Go home, consult your parents as your best and dearest friends under God, tell them all that is in your heart, and come to me again: good night my son!" "Good night sir, and thank you," returned Charlie Tristam; and leaving the vicarage he walked slowly home. He felt relieved; he knew he had done the right thing in consulting his pastor; he would do exactly as he had advised him and leave the rest in the hands of God. Would that all our children, as well as our youths and maidens were as careful and as anxious to follow the "things that be right" as Charlie Tristam was! It is no wonder that so many young people fall into sin at critical periods of their lives, seeing how self-possessed and self-willed they alas! very generally are! The wonder is that their number is not much larger! It is alas! too true that many, even of those who have endeavored to make a diligent use of the Sacraments and other means of grace, fall, and fall grievously; but they are not ignorant of the way of repentance, neither of the love of God, for have they not walked a long time in the one, and drunk deep draughts of the other? It is as true of the good child, the good youth as of the "good man," of whom the Psalmist says "Though he fall, he shall not be cast away, for the Lord upholdeth him with his Hand." What shall we say of those who have never endeavored to preserve this Baptismal purity of their souls, who have never experienced the sweet sense of security which follows from being made a child of God and the heir of everlasting light? The good man, the good youth,