



11.

AS a natural consequence, when the examination actually came memory played him false, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he kept his attention concentrated on his papers; and as he walked from the lecture room like a man in a dream, he overheard the fatal words spoken by the examining chaplain to a brother clergyman, "Poor Selby! he looks ill; worked too hard, I expect; at any rate, *he's done for*," and therein he found that his best fears were realised.

He had escaped as best he could from his companions, and turning his back on the town with a wild longing for the peace and quiet of the country, he had tramped along through the tranquil meadows.

For to him it meant absolute failure. Other men might try again, but for him there could be no second opportunity. No, it must be given up once and for all. He had tried his best; he knew that; but he had not been accounted worthy. He must go back to the dreary bank-books and ledgers. And poor Patience, who had hoped such great things—how should he tell her? And then the iron entered his very soul.

It was at this juncture that he had met his bishop, and almost against his will was drawn into conversation with him.

He was not in a state to reason calmly about anything. He was in that curious stage of over-wroughtness, mental and physical, when even the most reserved can be made to open the doors of their hearts; his defences were down, and he could not but respond to the touch of human kindness which bridged over the chasm of age and position and set the two men for the moment side by side. It was the man himself in his unfeigned sympathy, not the great bishop and his recent judge, who won his confidence; and as has been said he was ill-matched in his present frame of mind with his wily interlocutor, who beguiled his secrets from him without his realising how much he had revealed.

Lamely and prosaically enough as it seemed to him he told his story, in answer to the stream of questions to which reverence for the questioner added the force of a command. And when he had got at the kernel of the matter the shrewd ecclesiastic, who was a student of men as well as of books, fixed his piercing eyes on the troubled young face as if he would read him through and through. It was in truth a frank and earnest face, though it was clouded enough just now; not handsome or striking in any way, yet the honest grey eyes looked fearlessly on the world, and there was a certain ineffaceable look of truth and goodness about

it that inspired unquestioning trust.

Colouring in spite of himself beneath that sharp scrutiny, Selby was startled by hearing his companion say:

"Well, Mr. Selby, are you quite sure that this must be your last chance? Have you no friend who could give you the money for another year's study? My chaplain tells me your work shows promise. Another time you would be sure to succeed. In fact, I think I know of someone, a friend indeed of my own, who would give well, not give lend you the necessary means, and you could repay him again at your leisure."

The young man started, the colour flashed into his face and the light into his eyes, and then as swiftly died away, leaving him very pale.

"Your lordship is very good," he said slowly; "indeed I am more than grateful; but it is impossible, quite impossible. I am not clever, I might not succeed, and I dare not start in my career with a debt which for all I can see I might be years discharging, if I could ever do so. Besides which there is no time for me now; I have strained things to the uttermost already. I have others depending on me, and their claims cannot any longer be put aside. No; I have thought it all out, and I am sure that this is, and ought to be final."

"And yet it is no light thing to give up the service of God, Mr. Selby," said the bishop, with one of his sudden questioning glances.

"I hope I shall never do that," answered his companion simply. "Surely He has some work left even for laymen! and surely, before all things ought one not to serve Him with clean hands? I could not do this if I began by doing what I know to be wrong."

Again the other began to speak, but Selby put out his hands with a pleading gesture.

"It is more than good of you to have listened to me, sir," he said; "but for pity sake do not, I entreat you, ask me to go over it again. You do not, you cannot know all that stands in the way. I am not myself this afternoon; I dare not trust myself—it would take so little—and no one can judge but I of my duty—to make me go wrong!"

The bishop laid his hand kindly on his companion's arm. "I will not ask you," he said; "nay, more, I believe you are right, and I respect your decision. One thing I am sure of, Mr. Selby, that wherever you are and whatever you do, the Master we both seek to honour will find in you a very faithful servant."

Then, with a sudden dismissing of the subject, he set himself to talk with that fascination which was one of his special gifts, compelling the younger man's thoughts into other channels, so that the walk ended cheerfully enough. When the oddly assorted pair parted near the Cathedral gates, and Selby began to stammer out his thanks, the bishop cut him short, saying cheerily:

"Well, I may see you again before you go. At any rate, go home now and eat and get to bed and to sleep. You young folks are so fond of taking your troubles by wholesale; when you are as old I am you will be wiser. Perhaps—I don't know—I may have time for a word with you to-morrow."

He waved his hand and departed with a tranquil smile; while Selby, much mystified, and a little disconcerted by this apparently

somewhat uncalled-for cheerfulness, returned to his lodgings, followed the bishop's advice, went to bed and slept from sheer weariness.

It was after dinner and the bishop was in his library with his examining chaplain opposite to him, talking over the various candidates.

The latter had been telling the story of his afternoon walk, and it had gained, not lost, in pathos from his graphic recapitulation. Dr. Fraser was hard-headed and despondent emotion, but he was stirred in spite of himself; yet he was angry enough all the same.

"And the long and the short of it is——" he began.

"The long and the short of it is," interrupted his chief, "that you must look over Selby's papers again—indeed, I will have a look at them myself."

The chaplain was also an old friend, and he did not scruple to grumble freely as he unearthed the unfortunate papers, and a hot discussion followed, which was finally ended by the bishop saying:

"I don't care—they are inaccurate here and there, and he hasn't done enough, but they show talent; flashes of something more than talent, in fact, and earnestness of purpose. Besides, there is the fellow himself. I don't want men with brains only in my diocese. I want heart and character, and trifles like those when I can get them. It's no use fighting against fate, Fraser; *you've got to scrape him through!*"

"Well, of course it's within your lordship's discretion," returned the chaplain, doubling up the papers with an air of ostentatious resignation. "But I must say it's irregular—*highly irregular.*"

If the proverbial thunderbolt had fallen at his feet, Austin Selby could not have been more astonished than when he received Dr. Fraser's letter as he was lingering over his breakfast on the following morning.

"Although your papers are not altogether up to the requisite standard of merit," wrote the chaplain, "his lordship considers that they yet show evidence of intelligence and industry, and this, coupled with his personal knowledge of you and of your somewhat peculiar circumstances, has determined him to give you the benefit of a pass. From what the bishop has told me about you," finished the worthy examiner, determined to speak a word in season, "I do not think you are the kind of man either to forget or to presume on his lordship's undoubted leniency."

It is impossible to describe the revulsion from despair to hope, from disbelief to realisation that swept over Selby's mind when at last he succeeded in convincing himself that it was a fact and no delusive dream that had once more changed for him all the horizon.

Some years later Selby was called upon to preach in the cathedral of his ordination. He had already made something of a name as a powerful and eloquent preacher, though he clung too closely to his work in the little out-of-the-way First End parish ever to become fashionable. That evening, at the bishop's table, one who knew him well was describing his ceaseless labours in the waste places he was striving to redeem, aided and encouraged in all his efforts by the sister who had done so much for him.

"And to think of the jugglery we had to practise to get his papers through," sighed Dr. Fraser, as if the memory of that irregularity weighed upon him still.

"You had, you mean," retorted the bishop, with a twinkle of his eye; "for I had previously put him through a most difficult examination, *viva voce*, and I consider that he *passed—with Honours.*" [THE END.]