

CHAPTER XX.

Eleanor Prency was a miserable young woman during most of the great revival season which followed the special meetings at Dr. Guide's church. She did not see Reynolds Bartram as much as of old, for the young man spent most of his evenings at the church, assisting in the work. He sang no wild hymns, nor did he make any ecstatic speeches; nevertheless, his influence was great among his old acquaintances and upon the young men of the town. To "stand up for prayers" was to the latter class the supreme indication of courage or conviction, and any of them would have preferred to face death itself, at the muzzle of a gun, than take such a step. But that was not all; Bartram had for years been the leader of the unbelievers in the town; the logic of a young man who was smart enough to convince judges on the bench, in matters of law, was good enough for the general crowd when it was brought to bear upon religion. As one loungee at Weitz's saloon expressed himself: "None of the preachers or deacons or class-leaders was ever able to down that young fellow before. It's no use for the rest of us to put on airs now; nobody'll believe us, an' I like as not he'll be the first man to tell us what fools we be. I'm thinkin' a good deal of risin' for prayers myself, if it is only to get through before he gives me a talkin' to."

When, however, the entire membership of the church aroused to the fact that work was to be done, and Judge Prency and other solid citizens began to take part in the church work, Bartram rested from his efforts, and began again to spend his evenings in the home of the young woman whom he most admired. A change seemed to have come over others as well as himself. Mrs. Prency greeted him more kindly than ever, but Eleanor seemed different. She was not as merry, as defiant, or as sympathetic as of old. Sometimes there was a glimpse of old times, but suddenly the young woman would again become reserved and distant.

One evening, when she had begun to rally him about something and quickly lapsed into a different and languid manner, Bartram said: "Eleanor, nothing seems as it used to do, between me and you. I wish I knew what was wrong in me."

The girl suddenly interested herself in the contents of an antiquated photograph album.

"I must have become dreadfully uninteresting," he continued, "if you prefer the faces in that album, of which I have heard you make fun time and again. Won't you tell me what is wrong in me? Don't be afraid to talk plainly; I can stand anything—from you."

"Oh, nothing," said Eleanor, continuing to pretend interest in the pictures.

"'Nothing,' said in that tone always means something—and a great deal of it. Have I said or done anything to offend you?"

"No," said Eleanor, with a sigh, closing the book and folding her hands; "only—I didn't suppose you could ever become a pokey, prosy, old church member."