

ROMANCE OF A COUNTRY TOWN.

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CHAPTER VI.



IT was Saturday evening, and Miss Goddard had just said to Katharine, "I suppose we will have no sermon to-morrow. There is no preacher near here who is unemployed, but a minister who married three months after his wife died, and Cairnes women never tolerate that kind of immorality."

A quick step was heard outside the open door, and, in a minute, Mrs. Ostrander appeared, or at least gave audible proof of her arrival, for they were sitting in the warm darkness, discarding lights for fear of mosquitoes.

"We have a minister, Hannah," she exclaimed, "and, what is more, we can keep him all summer if we like."

"Where did we get him? Don't fall over that cushion, Maria."

"Well, he is a Mr. Willard, from the east somewhere. He has been camping out with a friend who is not well. They were foolish enough to pitch their tent over in the Knox woods, near the creek, and his friend had a chill. They sent for Doctor Summers, who ordered them under a roof forthwith, and pretty soon he found out that Mr. Willard was a clergyman without a charge. He has lately returned from Europe. The doctor told the church trustees, and they've asked him to preach to-morrow."

"I could do it for him," murmured Katharine, and was promptly called to account by Mrs. Ostrander.

"Don't you know how he will go on? We will have his emotions over the Eternal City, hung on some mention of St. Paul as a peg. He will serve up Mont Blanc and Cologne Cathedral—Savonarola, the Renaissance, and Michael Angelo's 'Last Judgment.' Cousin Hannah, I do not feel well. I mean to stay at home to-morrow, with Andy and the cats."

"Andy always goes to church, and my cats keep the Sabbath," laughed Hannah.

"Yes, and you must remember that

we have not been abroad, if you have, and after all, the enthusiasm of young ministers is inspiring sometimes," expostulated Maria.

"This must be the young man that Andy calls Peppergrass," put in Hannah, suddenly.

"And the one we passed that day I came. His bicycle frightened the horse, you know. He was very good looking," said Kate, recalling the gray eyes that she felt sure "took her in," spite of a capering horse and brevity of time. Softening into more sympathy with Mrs. Ostrander's large charity, she concluded to go to church, even if she must hear described the interior of St. Peter—the basilica's interior, of course, not the saint's own.

Every one who ever went to church at all was out the following morning, for there were several objects of interest to contemplate—first, there was Mr. Willard, then his friend, Mr. Allen, about whom some curiosity was felt, and expressed. Again, Katharine was an interesting stranger, and, besides, all the rest, was Mary Ferris, who had not been as yet thoroughly discussed.

It was generally conceded that Mr. Hugh Willard was very good looking. Certain young women said that he had a magnetic eye; probably they meant two of them, but they expressed themselves with self-restraint. His sermon had in it no allusion to anything described in Bædeker, no word of the original Greek, nor any mention of Plato or Praxiteles, but it was not commonplace. Hannah Goddard and Mr. Ferris were started on a new, helpful train of ideas, brought out of a review of the Gospel read, while some of the very old people were greatly pleased with the services.

To be sure, Polly Huggins said right out afterwards what others secretly thought—"That chap ain't specially gifted, not accordin' to my notion. I like a preacher who can just tread the upper corridors, melt into pathetic poetry, and git away off where I can't scarcely follow—come out at the windin' up on the high climbs of glory, with harps a-clangin', robes a-glistenin' and Cairnes nowhere. Not but what it is sensible