

The rector made impatient gestures.

"You do not get my meaning," he broke in. "I mean that the kingdom of the powers of evil is extending its borders. Actual sin is on the increase, and what is worse, there is a growing tendency everywhere to condone sin. I will give you an illustration of what I mean. There is living in this parish a young woman, the widow of an officer who was killed in Flanders, and the mother of a dear little child. She is living in open and unashamed sin with a returned officer who has been discharged from the army. It is a most distressing case. One would think that the woman, even if she had no respect for the memory of her dead husband, would at least think of the interests of her child. I ventured to remonstrate with the man about his conduct; but he turned on me with the foulest language, language so insulting that I could never again, I am afraid, bring myself to have anything to do with him."

China Macdonald asked for the man's name. He naturally felt a sort of parochial interest in any soldier who had gone wrong.

"Windermere," said the rector; then, with a start, he added, "You must know him; I think he was with your old battalion at the Front."

"Yes," replied China, "I know him well. I'm very much surprised by what you tell me. Windermere was one of the best officers in the battalion. I must go and see him. Will you tell me where he lives?"

Half-an-hour later China, who, once he had made up his mind to do a thing, never rested till he had done it, walked up to a frame cottage on a side-street in the outskirts of St. Kitts. It was such a cottage as might have belonged to a labourer; but it had about it a distinctive air of refinement. Flower-boxes and snow-white curtains garnished the windows; the garden was carefully tended and laid out with taste; the brass knocker on the front door shone like the stick-man's buttons at guard-mounting.

China's knock at the door was answered by a young man on crutches, dressed in shabby mufti. It was Windermere. For a moment the two men looked at each other without recognition. Then the light sprang into Windermere's eyes, and thrusting out his hand, he exclaimed heartily:

"The Padre, by God. I hardly knew you. Come in. Where the devil did you blow in from? By Jove, it's great to see you. I suppose you're back on leave."

The words tumbled out so fast that they carried with them just a suggestion of nervousness.

China was ushered into a sitting-room in which was burning a cheerful little grate fire. By the fire sat a girl dressed in black, relieved only by narrow white widow's collar and cuffs. Her face, at which China shot a searching glance, was beautiful in an unusual way: a fine forehead, such as one seldom sees in women, was only partially obscured by hair of the colour and texture of spun gold; the eyes were calm, but high-spirited; the mouth and chin were sensitive. Her hands were busy with some sewing, which she gathered up at China's entrance.

"Yvonne," said Windermere, "this is Major Macdonald. You have often heard me speak of him. He was the chaplain of the White Ghurkas. Mrs. Cadwallader," he explained, turning to China, "is keeping house for me. You must remember her husband; he was in the White Ghurkas, and died of wounds received in the same show as I was hit in."

China shook hands gravely. "Of course I remember your husband," he said; "I think I wrote to you at the time of his death telling you how much we all thought of him."

Mrs. Cadwallader acknowledged the receipt of the letter, which, she said, had been a great source of comfort to her at the time. Then, pleading the excuse of house-work, she withdrew, and left the two men to themselves.