

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A KNIGHT OF THE XIX. CENTURY.

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CHAPTER XLIV.—GROWTH.

The next morning Haldane received a message directing him to report himself at Mr. Iverson's private office during the noon recess.

"Be seated," said that gentleman as the young man, wearing an anxious and somewhat surprised expression, entered hesitatingly and diffidently. "You need not look so troubled, I have not sent for you to find fault—quite the reverse. You have 'a friend at court,' as the saying goes. Not that you needed one particularly, for I have had my eye upon you myself, and for some days past have been inclined to give you a lift. But last evening Mrs. Arnot spoke in your behalf, and through her words I have been led to take the following step. For reasons that perhaps you can understand, it would be difficult for me to give you a desk among my other clerks. I am not so sensitive, now that I know your better aims, and it is my wish that you take that desk there, in this, my private office. Your duties will be very miscellaneous. Sometimes I shall employ you as my errand boy, again I may entrust you with important and confidential business. I stipulate that you perform the humblest task as readily as any other."

Haldane's face flushed with pleasure, and he said warmly, "I am not in a position, sir, to consider any honest work beneath me, and after your kindness I shall regard any service I can render you as a privilege."

"A neat answer," laugh'd Mr. Iverson. "If you do your work as well I shall be satisfied. Pluck and good sense will make a man of you yet. I want you to distinctly understand that it has been your readiness and determination, not only to work, but to do any kind of work, that has won my good-will. Here's a check for a month's salary in advance. Be here to-morrow at nine, dressed suitably for your new position. — Good-morning."

"Halloo! What's happened?" asked Mr. Growther as Haldane came in that evening with face aglow with gladness and excitement.

"According to your theory I've been promoted sure," laugh'd the youth, and he related the unexpected event of the day.

"That's just like Mrs. Arnot," said Mr. Growther, rubbing his hands as he ever did when pleased; "she's allers givin' some poor critter a boost. T'other day 'twas me, now it's you agin, and they say she's helpin' lots more along. St. Peter will have to open the gate wide when she comes in with her crowd. 'Tears to me sometimes that I can fairly hear Satan a-gnashin' of his teeth over that woman. She's the worst enemy he has in town."

"I wish I might shew her how grateful I am some day," said Haldane, with moistened eyes; "but I clearly foresee that I can never repay her."

"No matter if you can't," replied the old man. "She don't want any pay. It's her natur' to do these things."

Haldane gave his whole mind to the mastery of his new duties, and after a few natural blunders speedily acquired a facility in the diverse tasks allotted him. In a manner that was perfectly unobtrusive and respectful he watched his employer, studied his methods and habit of mind, and thus gained the power of anticipating his wishes. Mr. Iverson began to find his office and papers kept in just the order he liked, the temperature maintained at a pleasant medium, and to receive many little nameless attentions that added to his comfort and reduced the wear and tear of life to a hurried business man; and when in emergencies Haldane was given tasks that required brains, he proved that he possessed a fair share of them.

After quite a lapse of time Mr. Iverson again happened to meet Mrs. Arnot, and he said to her—

"Haldane thinks you did him a great kindness in suggesting our present arrangement, but I am inclined to think you did me a greater, for you have no idea how useful the young fellow is making himself to me."

"Then you will have to find a new object of benevolence," answered the lady, "or you will have all your reward in this world."

"There it is again," said Mr. Iverson, with his hearty laugh, "you and Dr. Barstow give a man no peace. I'm going to take breath before I strike in again."

In his new employment Haldane, from the first, had found considerable leisure on his hands, and after a little thought decided to carefully review the studies over which he had passed so superficially in his student days.

Mr. Growther persisted in occupying the kitchen, leaving what had been designed as the parlour or sitting-room of his cottage to dust and damp. With his permission the young man fitted this up as a study, and bought a few popular works on science, as the nucleus of a library. After supper he read the evening paper to Mr. Growther, who soon fell into a doze, and then Haldane would steal away to his own quarters and pursue with zest, until a late hour, some study that had once seemed to him utterly dry and unattractive.

Thus the months glided rapidly and serenely away, and he was positively happy in a mode of life that he once would have characterized as odiously humdrum. The terrible world, whose favour had formerly seemed essential and its scorn unendurable, was almost forgotten; and as he continued at his duties so steadily and unobtrusively, the hostile world began to gradually unbend its frowning aspect toward him. Those whom he daily met in business commenced with a nod of recognition and eventually ended with a pleasant word. At church an increasing number began to speak to him, not merely as a Christian duty, but because the young man's sincere and earnest manner interested them and inspired respect.

The fact that he recognized that he was under a cloud and did not try to attract attention worked in his favour. He never asks the alms of a kindly word or glance, by looking

appealingly to one and another. It became his habit to walk with his eyes downcast, not looking to nor speaking to any one unless first addressed. At the same time his bearing was manly and erect, and marked by a certain quiet dignity which invariably characterizes all who are honestly trying to do right.

Because he asked so little of society it was the more disposed to give, and from a point of bare toleration it passed on to a willingness to patronize with a faint encouraging smile. And yet it was the general feeling that one whose name had been so sadly besmirched must be kept at more than arm's length.

"He may get to heaven," said an old lady, who was remarking upon his regular attendance at church, "but he can never hope to be received in good society again."

In the meantime the isolated youth was finding such an increasing charm in the companionship of the gifted minds who spoke to him from the printed pages of his little library that he felt the deprivation less and less.

But an hour with Mrs. Arnot was one of his chief pleasures, to which he looked forward with glad anticipation. For a long time he could not bring himself to go to her house or to take the risk of meeting any of her other guests, and in order to overcome his reluctance, she occasionally set apart an evening for him alone, and was "engaged" to all others. These were blessed hours to the lonely young fellow, and their memory made him stronger and more hopeful for days thereafter.

In his Christian experience he was gaining a quiet serenity and confidence. He had fully settled it in his mind, as Mrs. Arnot had suggested, that Jesus Christ was both willing and able to save him, and he simply trusted and tried to follow.

"Come," said the lady to him one evening, "it's time you found a nook in the vineyard, and went to work."

He shook his head emphatically as he replied, "I do not feel myself either competent or worthy. Besides, who would listen to me?"

"Many might, with profit. You can carry messages from Mr. Iverson, can you not take a message from your divine Master? I have thought it all over and can tell you where you will be listened to at least, and where you may do much good. I went last Sunday to the same prison in which I visited you, and I read to the inmates. It would be a moral triumph for you, Egbert, to go back there as a Christian man and with the honest purpose of doing good. It would be very pleasant for me to think of you at work there every Sabbath. Make the attempt to please me, if for no better reason."

"That settles the question, Mrs. Arnot," said Haldane, with a troubled smile. "I would try to preach in Choctaw, if you requested it, and I fear all that I can say out 'o' my own head, as Mr. Growther would put it, will be worse than Choctaw. But I can at least read to the prisoners; that is," he added, with downcast eyes and a flush of his old shame, "if they will listen to me, which I much doubt. You, with your large generous sympathies, can never understand how greatly I am despised even by my own class."

"Please remember that I am of your class now, for you are of the household of faith. I know what you mean, Egbert. I am glad that you are so diffident and so little inclined to ask on the ground of your Christian profession that the past be overlooked. If there is one thing that distinguishes me more than another it is the disposition to make one's religion a stepping-stone to earthly objects and the means of forcing upon others a familiarity, or a relationship, that is offensive to them. I cannot help doubting a profession of faith that is put to such low uses. I know that you have special reason for humility, but you must not let it develop into timidity. All I ask is that you read to such poor creatures in the prison as will listen to you a chapter in the Bible, and explain it as well as you can, and then read something else that you think will interest them."

Haldane made the attempt and met at first, as he feared, with but indifferent success. Even criminals looked at him askance as he came in the guise of a religious teacher. But his manner was so unassuming, and the spirit, "I am better than thou" was so conspicuously absent, that a few were disarmed, and partly out of curiosity, and partly to kill the time that passed so slowly, they gathered at his invitation. He sat down among them as if one of them, and in a voice that trembled with diffidence, read a chapter from the gospels. Since he "put on no airs," as they said, one and another drew near until all the inmates of the gaol were grouped around him. Having finished the chapter, Haldane closed the Bible and said:

"I do not feel competent to explain this chapter. Perhaps many of you understand it better than I do. I do not even feel that I was worthy to come here and read the chapter to you, but the Christian lady who visited you last Sunday asked me to come, and I would do anything for her. She visited me when I was a prisoner like you, and through her influence I am trying to be a better man. I know, my friends, from sad experience that when we get down under men's feet and are sent to places like these, we lose heart and hope, we feel that there is no chance for us to get up again, we are tempted to be despairing and reckless; but through the kindness and mercy of that good lady, Mrs. Arnot, I learned of a kindness and mercy even greater than hers. The world may hate us, scorn us, and even trample us down, and if we will be honest with ourselves, we must admit that we have given it some reason to do all this—at least I feel that I have—but the world can't keep us down, and what is far worse than the world, the evil in our own hearts can't keep us down if we ask Jesus Christ to help us up. I am finding this out by experience, and so know the truth of what I am saying. This Bible tells us about this strong, merciful One, this friend of publicans and sinners, and if you would like me to come here Sunday afternoons and read about Him, I will do so very gladly, but I don't wish to force myself upon you if I'm not wanted."

"Come, my hearty, come every time," said an old sailor, with a resounding oath. "Tain't likely I'll ever ship with

your captain, for sech as I've come to couldn't pass muster. Howsumever, it's kind o' comfortin' to hear one talk as if there was plenty of sea-room, even when a chap knows he's drivin' on the rocks."

"Come, oh, come again," entreated the tremulous voice of one who was crouching a little behind his chair.

Haldane turned, and with a start recognized the fair young girl, whose blue eyes and Madonna-like face had, for a moment, even in the agony o' his own shame, secured his attention while in the police court, more than a year before. She was terribly changed, and yet by that strange principle by which we keep our identity through all mutations, Haldane knew that she was the same, and felt that by a glance he could almost trace back her life through its awful descent to the time when she was a beautiful and innocent girl. As a swift, dark tide might sweep a summer pinnace from its moorings, and dash it on the rocks until it became a crushed and shapeless thing, so passion or most untoward circumstances had suddenly drawn this poor young creature among coarse, destructive vices that had shattered the delicate, womanly nature in one short year into utter wreck.

"Come again," she whispered in response to Haldane's glance, "come soon, or else I shall be in my grave, and I've got the awful fear that it is the mouth of the bottomless-pit. Otherwise I'd be glad to be in it."

"Poor child!" said Haldane, tears coming into his eyes.

"Ah!" she gasped, "will God pity me like that?"

"Yes, for the Bible says, 'The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.' My own despairing thoughts have taught me to look for all of God's promises."

"You know nothing of the depths into which I have fallen," she said, in a low tone; "I can see that in your face."

Again Haldane ejaculated, "Poor child!" with a heartfelt emphasis that did more good than the longest homily. Then finding the Bible story which commences, "And behold a woman in the city, which was a sinner," he turned a leaf down, saying,

"I am neither wise enough nor good enough to guide you, but I know that Mrs. Arnot will come and see you. I shall leave my Bible with you, and until she comes, read where I have marked."

Mrs. Arnot did come, and the pure high-born woman shut the door of the narrow cell, and taking the head of her fallen sister into her lap, listened with responsive tears to the piteous story, as it was told with sighs, sobs, and strong writhings of anguish.

As the girl became calmer and her mind emerged from the chaos of her tempestuous and despairing sorrow, Mrs. Arnot led her as it were to the very feet of Jesus of Nazareth, and left her there with these words:

"He came to seek and save just such as you are—the lost. He is reaching down His rescuing hand of love to you, and when you grasp it in simple confiding trust you are saved."

Before the week closed, the poor creature forever turned her face from the world in which she had so deeply sinned and suffered; but before she departed on the long journey, He who alone can grant to the human soul full absolution, had said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven; go in peace."

As Mrs. Arnot held her dying head she whispered, "Tell him that it was his tears of honest sympathy that first gave me hope."

That message had a vital influence over Haldane's subsequent life. Indeed these words of the poor dying waif were potent enough to shape all his future career. He was taught by them the magnetic power of sympathy, and that he who in the depths of his heart feels for his fellow creatures can help them. He had once hoped that he would dazzle men's eyes by the brilliancy of his career, but he had long since concluded that he must plod along the lowly paths of life. Until his visit to the prison and its results the thought had scarcely occurred to him that he could help others. He had felt that he had been too sorely wounded himself ever to be more than an invalid in the world's hospital, but he now began to learn that his very sin and suffering enabled him to approach nearer to those who were, as he once was, on the brink of despair or in the apathy of utter discouragement, and to aid them more effectually because of his kindred experience.

The truth that he, in the humblest possible way, could engage in the noble work for which he revered Mrs. Arnot, came like a burst of sunlight into his shadowed life, and his visits to the prison were looked forward to with increasing zest.

From reading the chapter merely he came to venture on a few comments. Then questions were asked, and he tried to answer some, and frankly said he could not answer others. But these questions stimulated his mind and led to thought and wider reading. To his own agreeable surprise as well as that of his prison class, he occasionally was able to bring, on the following Sabbath, a very satisfactory answer to some of the questions; and this suggested the truth that all questions could be answered if only time and wisdom enough could be brought to bear upon them.

He gradually acquired a facility in expressing his thoughts, and, better still, he had thoughts to express. Some of the prisoners, who were in durance but for a brief time, asked him to take a class in the Guy street Mission Chapel.

"They will scarcely want me there as a teacher," he said, with a slight flush.

But the superintendent and pastor, after some hesitation and inquiry, concluded they did want him there, and with some ex-prisoners as a nucleus, he unobtrusively formed a class near the door. The two marked characteristics of his Christian efforts, downright sincerity and sympathy, were like strong far-reaching hands, and his class began to grow until it swamped the small neighbouring classes with uncouth and unkempt looking creatures, that were drawn by the voice that asserted their manhood and womanhood in spite of their degradation. Finally, before another year ended, a large side-room was set apart for Haldane and his