

"Of course—and I shall not accept your apology, without your reason. Is he not handsome?"

"Very."

"Intelligent and amiable?"

"I do not doubt it."

"What then are your objections to him?"

"My chief one will not weigh one grain in your scale, Anne; why should I name it again?"

"Then it actually is his want of a long face and canting piety!"

"Not at all. Had you said it was his want of religion, as a governing principle of life, you would have said right."

"And if he was what people call religious, I can assure you, I would never marry him!" warmly exclaimed the impetuous Anne. "Thank fortune! he has none of it, and I hope will never have any."

Clara was silent, and Mrs. Courtland endeavoured to calm the rising storm, by changing the subject of conversation; but it was impossible, and, with evident ill humour on one side, and much uneasiness on the other, the little party separated for the night.

Clara Allen, although far inferior to her cousin in personal beauty, far surpassed her in a sweetness of manner and expression, that fastinated the beholder, by impressing him with the conviction that a lovely spirit dwelt within. She had been for some time a practical Christian—the beautiful precepts of Scripture were the guide of her life, and its promises gave the hope which sustained her in her onward course; they were the rock on which she trusted to stand, when the tempest of calamity should overtake her. The pressing solicitations of her aunt and cousin had drawn her from her peaceful maternal abode, to mingle for a season, in the gay circles of the metropolis of New England; and she had been but a few days the guest of her relations, when the preceding conversation took place. She had listened with painful emotion to the sneers of her cousin, directed as they were against all that was most precious to her own heart; and her correct judgment could not but see that the admonitions of a mother were of essential importance, to check such improprieties—yet she heard nothing that could produce that effect, but, on the contrary, observed in her aunt an evident fear of offending her daughter, which led to a thousand evasions, too well understood by Anne to render them effectual in restraining her—and the conscientious girl retired to rest, her heart filled with many desires to do good, and many fears of evil. Nor was Mrs. Courtland less uncomfortable. Possessing an affectionate disposition, and a real anxiety to be filled with that spirit which is kind, her gentle nature preferred concession or concealment, to the task of contending with the passionate temper of her daughter; and thus, through a weakness almost unpardonable, she was daily subjected to scenes, which a proper degree of decision on her part, would have prevented.

Anne Courtland had, with all her imperfections, an amiable, or rather a kind disposition, and the recollection of her unkindness to her cousin, carried her early in the morning to her chamber, to apologise for her conduct; and she felt but the more self-condemned as Clara frankly accorded her forgiveness.

"I can easily pardon your severity to myself, dear Anne," said this amiable girl; "but can you forgive yourself for your disrespect to your mother and her friends?"

"To my mother! Oh, she does not mind it!—and she does so vex me by going to those odious places?"

"Can you wish to restrain her from visiting the places most agreeable to her? Has she not a right to regulate her own actions, and if so ought her daughter to wish to control her?"

"You question very closely, my dear Clara, but since I am upon my good behaviour, I will even answer you truly. It is very ungenerous in me to oppose her, since I know that it contributes to her happiness; but I am always so fearful that she will act and talk like those praying, canting people, that I am unwilling she should associate with them."

"You are so candid in acknowledging an error, my beloved cousin, that I am unwilling to vex you, and yet there is one question I am very desirous of asking you."

"Do not fear; I am in a wonderfully good temper this morning, and can bear a great deal."

"I will venture then to ask you, why you hate prayer?"

"Hate prayer!" exclaimed the astonished Anne, "how could you imagine such a thing?"

"Have you not repeatedly spoken of 'praying people' as objects of your scorn? And am I not justified in believing that prayer is your aversion, when you dislike those who practise it?"

"Oh! it is not their prayers that I dislike, but the noise that is made about them; and the long solemn faces that are put on by these religious folks."

"Would you have them smile when they are confessing their sins, and entreating pardon for them? Or do you think the thanksgiving of a Christian would be more acceptable for being uttered with levity?"

"I do not; but I think the Christian ought, of all persons, to be the happiest."

"You are right, dear Anne, and in general I believe he is so; but while a dweller on the earth, he will often offend his Creator; and can we wonder that this thought should occasion him much anguish of heart, or that this anguish should betray itself on the countenance, as readily as any other sorrow?"

"But if he does as well as he can why should he not be happy? Surely nothing more can be required of him than that."

"True, but who can seriously say, 'I have done all the good that was in my power?' Who fulfils