

CHRISTINE.

BY KATHERINE PEARSON WOODS.

II.

Captain Royal Fern was seldom either puzzled or discouraged. Why should one be, he would have asked, who has the infinite wisdom and strength at his command to draw upon freely? It was the chief characteristic of the Ferns that they had become as little children; with every trial or perplexity they went, as little children do, straight to the Father, and that not from duty but naturally and instinctively, because he was their father and they loved him.

Otherwise, indeed, even Captain Praise-the-Lord might have been puzzled to know how the Weekeses were ever to be reformed and made self-supporting members of society, a point which had been a poser to the Charity Organization people, from the board of visitors and the case committees down to Miss Guest, the little near-sighted Friendly Visitor with the black silk bag and the rimless eyeglasses. But Captain Praise-the-Lord had laid the matter in the proper hands; it was never he who did the Lord's work; if anything were accomplished it was the Lord himself who worked in and through Royal Fern to accomplish it.

I seem to be writing mere commonplaces; would it be possible, I wonder, to make any one realize how very actual they were to Royal Fern? All of us—that is, if we call ourselves Christians in any sense of the word—would admit the general statement; in practice most of us act as though we were the only workers and the Lord had very little to do with it, except, perhaps, to give us a certain amount of fuel or ammunition, impossible to do without and of which he holds the monopoly, known by the name of grace. Some of us alternate between wild attacks of doing everything ourselves (our quantum of grace being, of course, understood) and equally wild fits of wishing to be nothing, a sudden realizing sense having been given to us that we amount to just about that in the work of the world. But those who try to do any real work along the lines of spiritual development learn, and that whether they be Christians or agnostics, of the existence of a Power that maketh for righteousness—a “destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may”; learn it as one learns the strength of the current of a stream, by being borne with it whether we will or no; learn that when we call ourselves mere instruments we are using no figure, but speaking plain fact; that this Power has its own ends to accomplish and uses us to accomplish them, blindly if we will it so, otherwise like a child doing the will of its father. But the joy of this latter serving, of seeing just a little way into the Father's plans, of

finding out the meaning of events of which we thought slightly or not at all until we discovered their beautiful significance, of seeing even our failures and mistakes atoned and made the best of—who can describe the joy of these things?

But sometimes the ways of Providence are different from those that we would ourselves have selected. I am quite sure, for example, that not even Royal Fern, far less the Charity Organization Society, would have begun the evangelization of the Weekeses family by getting the only one of them who was earning an honest living put out of her place.

And yet it was largely owing to Captain Royal's visit, after all. When he had left them the Weekeses stood regarding each other in silence for a moment, then Dora said, with a giggle, “I like people to be practical; how can folks work for the Lord when they're as poor as we are?”

“That's so,” said Mrs. Weekes.

“He said in his prayer,” murmured Christine, her great shining eyes looking far away, beyond the narrow, untidy room, “he prayed that we might have love enough to be clean. And it isn't cold weather now, can't we be clean for the Lord?”

“What notions you do take in your head, Christine Weekes,” said Dora. But Christine had already begun to stir up the fire and fill the kettle, in preparation for scrubbing.

“My!” said her mother, weakly, “a body'd think, to look at you, Christine, that judgment day was coming early tomorrow morning.”

But nothing could stop Christine. Silent as ever, but with that strange light shining in her usually dull eyes, she went to work with an energy and fervor that against their will took hold of the others, if we except Patty. Presently she began to sing a hymn she had heard at the mission, “What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord.” Now Christine had a clear, sweet voice, and it rang through the uncarpeted house until the unaccustomed sound brought some of the upstairs neighbors down to ask if by any chance “them evangelist folks,” were holding a cottage meeting in Mother Weekeses kitchen.

“It's only Christine,” replied Dora, with her inevitable giggle. “She thinks judgment day is coming and is bound to be ready to meet the Lord.”

Christine stopped scrubbing the table to look at Dora reproachfully. Her arms were bare and her face flushed. She looked more alive than any one there had ever seen her. “The Lord is here now, and you know it, Dora Weekes,” she said. “And I'm more ashamed for him to see this dirty room than I was for Captain Praise-the-Lord. Why don't you take hold and help, instead of talking like that?”

“Well, my sakes!” said the upstairs neighbor. “If the Lord is here, I shouldn't want he should see my rooms, as bad as they look. When you get through in here, Christine, you might take hold and help me.”

“I will,” said Christine, promptly. She lifted her head again from her work and looked the woman full in the face with her strangely luminous eyes. “And I couldn't no more stand up to no such look as that,” that person said afterwards, “than of it had a been the arch angel Gabriel himself.” She turned on her heel and quitted the room abruptly.

It was only natural that the boys should have fled at the sight of brooms and scrubbing brushes, but it did seem a little strange that Patty, whose whole endeavor, as she had so often told Miss Guest, was to persuade her family to live more “like folks,” I say it was a little odd that Patty should have been angered by her sister's proceedings, and should have gone to see Miss Guest about it that very moment.

Miss Guest received her in the parlor, as she would have done any other visitor, and came down stairs without her black silk bag but with her rimless eyeglasses. “But isn't it a good thing they should clean up at any time, and on any terms?” she said, a little puzzled. “Of course I understand it must be very inconvenient, and I have no more sympathy than you have, Miss Weekes, with these erratic forms of religion.”

Miss Guest always called her “cases” Mr., Mrs. or Miss as the case might be; she thought it helped to develop their self-respect.

“I shall be at the tenements in a day or two,” she said, “and will try to investigate that mission, and see if there is anything to be done about it. Meanwhile I think if you tried to help along in anything that was good, even if it is a little extreme or inconvenient”—

But Miss Guest felt that this “case” had outgrown her powers, and must be discussed at the very next meeting of the board of visitors.

Now Patty, meanwhile, felt that Miss Guest had in a measure failed her; she had not seen things at all as she was expected to see them. Perhaps Patty's self-respect had been developed a trifle unhealthily, and her temper was by no means soothed by finding not only Christine, but Dora and her mother—“at her age!”—on their knees, scrubbing and singing, and not a dry place in the house fit to sit down in. It would really have been trying to any one.

However, no one, not even Patty, took cold. People seldom did take cold in the tenements, unless they died of it immediately. But Patty went to her work the next morning very much in the frame of mind of the Irishman who was “apolling for a fight, and as luck or Providence would have it, that very day some money was missed from the cash drawer and circumstances conspired to throw the blame on Patty. To be sure, the proprietress of the establishment, who was herself a lady of very certain temper, remembered in half an hour or so that she had taken it out herself to pay a bill and forgotten to keep a record of the matter; but by this time words had passed between herself and the accused which, as the “madam” said, “she couldn't take off of no lady.” And so at eventide Patty found herself returning to her home, with her wages in her pocket, no situation nor recommendation, except as “the sassiest girl in the city.”

She turned aside a little out of her way, for there was surely no hurry and the hour was only afternoon, to sit for a moment on a bench in one of the public squares and think. But it was rather a trance of passive misery in which she was sunk when she was touched on the shoulder, and Miss Guest sat down beside her, reassured that it was indeed Patty Weekes who sat huddled up into such an opposite of her usual alert readiness, and also sure that some-

thing had happened. When she was told its nature she felt the situation a relief, as being one with which she was entirely competent to deal. "We will find you something else," she said, "and meanwhile, though you know I am not rich, I think I can promise that you shall not starve, especially as your family do really seem to be anxious to improve. Come, I daresay it is the force of your example telling on them. At last, so you ought to be very well satisfied, even if you are temporarily out of a place. And now I am on my way to this mission you told me of. Should you like to go along?" And Patty could not very well refuse.

There were only some dozen persons in the bare little room when they entered it; the long rows of benches were well-nigh empty, and beside the table, at the farther end, on which lay a Bible and hymn-book, stood only Captain Praise the Lord. He was speaking as they came in, but very ineffectively, as it seemed to the little Friendly Visitor. She smiled to herself at the amount of energy wasted on fanaticism, though the next moment she sighed to think what it might have accomplished if it had but been employed in character building. Then she settled herself to listen.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength," said Captain Praise the Lord; "that's what I'm talking to you about, this afternoon. You people that are here now ar'n't the kind that come at night, and you know you're not; why at night we have thieves and pick-pockets, burglars, perhaps, and women off the streets—yes, even murderers, praise the Lord, and very glad to get 'em, too. But you people that are here now—why, most of your faces I know, and the rest are of the same brand—you are not criminals, whatever else you may be. And it seemed to me, when I was wondering what on earth I should talk to you about—because, you understand, there are so many things that a man would like to say, if he had a thousand tongues, as the hymn says—well, it seemed to me that all of you want the joy of the Lord more than you want anything else. It's a pretty hard life we have of it here in the tenements; a good bit harder than it need be if houses were built to live in, instead of only to rent; and I often hear people say that they feel "just about ready to give up." Now that's the time, when you are ready to give up, that you want the joy of the Lord. More than that, it's the time when, if you haven't got the joy of the Lord, you'll go and get the joy of the devil—that is, a drink of whisky. I'm not blaming you at all; if you haven't got the one, it does seem as if you couldn't get along without the other; but the Lord's joy costs less, and doesn't give you a headache next morning. Would not you like to be so full of that joy that nothing would seem hard to you?—that you wouldn't even remember you were cold and hungry and could work all day, hardly conscious of your own body because you were so happy in the Lord's presence? Why, my brothers and sisters, I hear some of you say, sometimes, that you can't be happy without you had more money. Now it seems to me that because you haven't got money, you must be happy, or how are you to live at all? Rich men have a good deal that gives them a sort of thing that they call happiness; but what has the poor man got but God Almighty and his Son, Jesus Christ? Yes, and what more does he want?"

It seemed very poor political economy to Miss Guest, but when she looked around the hard, despairing expression had gone from Patty's face, and Patty was in tears. After the address was over, and there was much more in it than I have had space to record, Ruth, who had come in during its progress, came to the girl's side and laid her hand on the bowed head. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," said Ruth. "Is the way very dark, my sister?"

"She's just lost her situation," replied Miss Guest, thinking that she was making it easier for Patty, and not guessing that the presence of one who had so sedulously cultivated her self respect was making it doubly hard.

Ruth smiled. "Lost her situation?" she said. "O, no, ma'am, she has found one; she has become the handmaiden of the Lord!"