PEOPLE AT PISGAH

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I.

THE CORTRIGHT DIAMOND.

IN the dusk of an early summer evening the towering front of Dr. Van Nuynthlee's church loomed up on Madison Avenue, massive and solemn. Around the corner its gray buttresses and sombre gothic windows stretched back in long vista into the shadows. In the ivy-covered chapel beyond, the lights of the mid-week meeting gleamed cheerily on passers-by until long after the dusk had deepened into darkness It was not uncommon for Dr. Van Nuynthlee to be thus detained at the close of the mid-week service. When the last word of benediction was spoken, and the people crowded into the aisles and moved slowly out, there were always some who stayed to exchange friendly

greetings, or to discuss the many plans of a great church organization. With so many city homes deserted for the summer the chapel had seemed scantily filled; but the announcement of the death of Courtland Cortright led an unusual number to linger after the service. They gathered around Dr. Van Nuynthlee as he stepped down from the desk to speak in hushed voices of the sad event, and of the change it seemed to necessitate in their pastor's plans.

Dr. Van Nuynthlee had accepted a flattering invitation to deliver the closing address at the Interdenominational Ecumenical Congress soon to meet at Saratoga, but with the assembling of the Congress close at hand, the pressure of pastoral duties had precluded any preparation for that event.

The deliberations of the Congress were to cover a period of nearly two weeks, commencing on the following Sabbath. Though the discourse of Dr. Van Nuynthlee was reserved for the final session, he wished to reach Saratoga as soon as circumstances would permit. To complete the task before him at the earliest moment possible, he determined to pass the intervening days in absolute rural seclusion. A friend had commended North

Pisgah in Northern Vermont as admirably suited to the doctor's purpose, and it had been arranged accordingly that he should set out on the morrow for Pisgah, and for the farm-house of Deacon Meshach Meiggs.

The message announcing the death of Mr. Cortright had urgently requested Dr. Van Nuynthlee's presence at the funeral, and, while he was oppressed by the thought that every instant was precious, the immediate duty before him seemed imperative. After earnest consultation, in which it was suggested that a desirable route to the Green Hills would carry him near the Cortright estates, he decided to postpone his departure and perform the last offices for his old parishioner.

On his arrival, two days later, at the desolate manor on the Hudson, Dr. Van Nuynthlee learned of a simple trust which Courtland Cortright in his closing hours had committed to his pastor.

He had directed that a certain jewel, long an heirloom in the family, be placed in Dr. Van Nuynthlee's charge until the return of Mrs. Cortright, who was travelling with an invalid sister abroad. The jewel was a diamond set in a gold brooch, guarded with a

strong pin and clasp. Though a gem of extraordinary size and value it attracted special notice by its rare color, a peculiar tinge of red, imparting a soft radiance unlike the showy glitter of a clear white brilliant. In repose it sparkled with this warm, ruddy light, but there were times when it could dazzle with its rich lustre, or startle with a fiery gleam. The stone, though roughly cut, was preserved without change as a souvenir of early family history.

Near the dawn of the seventeenth century, Courtlandt van Kourtright, the younger son of a wealthy merchant of Haarlem, had sailed with the hardy navigator Jacob Heemskerk on a voyage to the golden regions of Cathay.

While coasting along the Malay Peninsula, they learned of the arrival in the Straits of Malacca of a great Lisbon carack laden with the richest merchandise; pearls, spices, silks, costly fabrics, and precious stones. The fearless Heemskerk with his two galleots attacked and captured the huge vessel, and this diamond had fallen to the lot of Courtlandt van Kourtright as his share of the spoil.

As they learned in sailing homeward along the Indian coast, the stone had been found half a century earlier near Golconda, and