

tell. I only knew that feelings and influences which long had been gathering in me were assuming the predominance, and that I was entering upon a new phase of experience. At last I went to bed, and passed a night crowded with strange dreams and dreary passages of unrefreshing slumber.

CHAPTER IX.

I PASS THROUGH A TERRIBLE TEMPEST INTO THE SUNLIGHT.

I HAD never arrived at any definite comprehension of Mrs. Sanderson's ideas of religion. Whether she was religious in any worthy sense I do not know, even to-day. The respect which she entertained for the clergy was a sentiment which she shared with New Englanders generally. She was rather generous than otherwise in her contributions to their support, yet the most I could make of her views and opinions was that religion and its institutions were favorable to the public order and security, and were, therefore, to be patronized and permanently sustained. I never should have thought of going to her for spiritual counsel, yet I had learned in some way that she thought religion was a good thing for a young man, because it would save him from dissipation and from a great many dangers to which young men are exposed. The whole subject seemed to be regarded by her in an economical or prudential aspect.

I met her on the morning following my visit at the Bradfords, in the breakfast-room. She was cheery and expectant, for she always found me talkative, and was prepared to hear the full story of the previous evening. That I was obliged to tell her that Henry was there with my sister, embarrassed me much, for, beyond the fact that she disliked Henry intensely, there was the further fact—most offensive to her—that Mr. Bradford was socially patronizing the poor, and bringing me, her *protégé*, into association with them. Here was where my chain galled me, and made me realize my slavery. I saw the thrill of anger that shot through her face, and recognized the effort she made to control her words. She did not speak at first, and not until she felt perfectly sure of self-control did she say:

"Mr. Bradford is very unwise. He inflicts a great wrong upon

young people without position or expectations, when he undertakes to raise them to his own social level. How he could do such a thing as he did last night is more than I can imagine, unless he wishes either to humiliate you or offend me."

For that one moment how I longed to pour out my love for Henry and Claire, and to speak my sense of justice in the vindication of Mr. Bradford! It was terrible to sit still and hold my tongue while the ties of blood and friendship were condemned, and the motives of my hospitable host were misconstrued so cruelly. Yet I could not open my lips. I dreaded a collision with her as if she had been a serpent, or a furnace of fire, or a hedge of thorns. Ay, I was mean enough to explain that I had no expectation of meeting either Henry or my sister there; and she was adroit enough to reply that she was at least sure of that without my saying so.

Then I talked fully of Mr. Grimshaw's call, and gave such details of the conversation that occurred as I could without making Mr. Bradford too prominent.

"So Mr. Bradford doesn't like Mr. Bedlow," she remarked; "but Mr. Bradford is a trifle whimsical in his likes and dislikes. I'm sure I've always heard Mr. Bedlow well spoken of. He has the credit of having done a great deal of good, and if he is coming here, Arthur, I think you cannot do better than to go and hear him for yourself."

Like a flash of light there passed through my mind the thought that Providence had not only thus opened the way for me, but with an imperative finger had directed me to walk in it. God had made the wrath of woman to praise Him, and the remainder He had restrained. Imagining myself to be thus directed, I should not have dared to avoid Mr. Bedlow's preaching. The whole interview with Mr. Grimshaw, the fact that, contrary to my wont, I had not found myself in sympathy with my old friend, Mr. Bradford, and the strange and unlooked-for result of my conversation with Mrs. Sanderson, shaped themselves into a divine mandate to whose authority my spirit bowed in ready obedience.

Mr. Bedlow made his appearance in Mr. Grimshaw's pulpit on the following Sunday; and a great throng of excited and expectant people, attracted by the notoriety of the preacher, and moved by the influences of the time, were in attendance. The hush of solemnity that pervaded the assembly when these two men entered the desk impressed me deeply. My spirit was thrilled with strange apprehension. My emotional nature was in chaos; and such crystallizations of opinion, thought, and feeling as had taken place in me during a life-long course of religious nurture and education were broken up. Outside of the church, and entirely lacking that dramatic experience of conversion and regeneration which all around me regarded as the only true beginning of a religious life, my whole soul lay open, quick and quivering, to the influences of the hour, and the words which soon fell upon it.

The pastor conducted the opening services, and I had never seen him in such a mood. Inspired by the presence of an immense congregation and by the spirit of the time, he rose entirely out of the mechanisms of his theology and his stereotyped forms of expression, and poured out the burden of his soul in a prayer that melted every heart before him. Deprecating the judgments of the Most High on the coldness and worldliness of the church; beseeching the Spirit of all Grace to come and work its own great miracles upon those who loved the Master, moving them to penitence, self-sacrifice, humility and prayer, entreating that Spirit to plant the arrows of conviction in all unconverted souls, and to bring a great multitude of these into the Kingdom—a multitude so great that they should be like doves flocking to their windows—he prayed like a man inspired. His voice trembled and choked with emotion, and the tears coursed down his cheeks unheeded. It seemed as if he could not pause, or be denied.

Of Mr. Bedlow's sermon that followed I can give no fitting idea. After a severe denunciation of the coldness of the church that grieved and repelled the Spirit of God, he turned to those without the fold—to the unconverted and impenitent. He told

us that God was angry with us every day, that every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts was only evil continually, that we were exposed every moment to death and the perdition of ungodly men, and that it was our duty to turn, then and there, from the error of our ways, and to seek and secure the pardon which a pitying Christ extended to us—a pardon which could be had for the taking. Then he painted with wonderful power the joy and peace that follow the consciousness of sin forgiven, and the glories of that heaven which the Saviour had gone to prepare for those who love Him.

I went home blind, staggering, almost benumbed—with the words ringing in my ears that it had been my duty before rising from my seat to give myself to the Saviour, and to go out of the door rejoicing in the possession of a hope which should be as an anchor in all the storms of my life; yet I did not know what the process was. I was sure I did not know. I had not the slightest comprehension of what was required of me, yet the fact did not save me from the impression that I had committed a great sin. I went to my room and tried to pray, and spent half an hour of such helpless and pitiful distress as I cannot describe. Then there arose in me a longing for companionship. I could not unbosom myself to Mrs. Sanderson. Henry's calm spirit and sympathetic counsels were beyond my reach. Mr. Bradford was not in the church, and I could only think of my father, and determine that I would see him. I ate but little dinner, made no conversation with Mrs. Sanderson, and, toward night, left the house and sought my father's home.

I found the house as solemn as death. All the family save Claire had heard Mr. Bedlow, and my mother was profoundly dejected. A cloud rested upon my brothers and sisters. My father apprehended at once the nature of my errand, and, by what seemed to be a mutual impulse and understanding, we passed into an unoccupied room and closed the door. The moment I found myself alone with him I threw my arms around his neck, and bursting into an uncontrollable fit of weeping exclaimed: "Oh, father! father! what shall I do?"

For years I had not come to him with a trouble. For years I had not reposed in him a single heart-confidence, and for the first time in his life he put both his arms affectionately around me and embraced me. Minutes passed while we stood thus. I could not see his face, for my own was bowed upon his shoulder, but I could feel his heart-beats, and the convulsions of emotion which shook him in every fiber. At last he gently put me off, led me to a seat, and sat down beside me. He took my hand, but he could not speak.

"Oh, father! what shall I do?" I exclaimed again.

"Go to God, my boy, and repeat the same words to him with the same earnestness."

"But he is angry with me," I said, "and you are not. You pity me and love me. I am your child. You cannot help being sorry for me."

"You are his child too, my boy, by relations a thousand times tenderer and more significant than those which make you mine. He loves you and pities you more than I can."

"But I don't know how to give myself to him," I said.

"I have had the impression and the hope," my father responded, "that you had already given yourself to him."

"Oh, not in this way at all," I said.

My father had his own convictions, but he was almost morbidly conscientious in all his dealings with the souls around him. Fearful of meddling with that which the Gracious Spirit had in charge and under influence, and modest in the assertion of views which might possibly weaken the hold of conviction upon me; feeling, too, that he did not know me well enough to direct me, and fearful that he might arrest a process which, perfected, might redeem me, he simply said: "I am not wise; let us pray together, that we may be led aright."

Then he kneeled and prayed for me. Ah! how the blessed words of that prayer have lingered in my memory! Though not immediately fruitful in my experience, they came to me long years after, loaded with the balm of healing. "Oh, Father in Heaven!" he said, "this is our boy,—thy child and

mine. Thou lovest and pitiest him more than I can. Help him to go to Thee as he has come to me, and to say in perfect submission, 'Oh, Father, what shall I do!'

I went home at last somewhat calmed, because I had had sympathy, and, for a few moments, had leaned upon another nature and rested. I ate little, and, as soon as the hour arrived, departed to attend the evening service, previously having asked old Jenks to attend the meeting and walk home with me, for I was afraid to return alone.

A strange and gloomy change had come over the sky; and the weather, which had been extremely cold for a week, had grown warm. The snow under my feet was soft and yielding, and already little rivulets were coursing along the ruts worn by the sleighs. The nerves which had been braced by the tonic of the cold, clear air were relaxed, and with the uncertain footing of the streets I went staggering to the church.

In the endeavor now to analyze my feelings I find it impossible to believe that I was convinced that my life had been one of bold and intentional sin. A considerable part of my pain, I know, arose from the fact that I could not realize my own sinfulness as it had been represented to me. I despaired because I could not despair. I was distressed because I could not be sufficiently distressed. There was one sin, however, of which I had a terrified consciousness, viz., that of rejecting the offer of mercy which had been made to me in the morning, and of so rejecting it as to be in danger of forever grieving away the Spirit of God which I believed was at work upon my heart. This was something definite and dreadful, though I felt perfectly ignorant of the exact thing required of me and impotent to perform it. If I could have known the precise nature of the surrender demanded of me, and could have comprehended the effort I was called upon to make, I believe I should have been ready for both; but in truth I had been so mystified by the preacher, so puzzled by his representation of the miracle of conversion, which he made to appear to be dependent on God's sovereign grace entirely, and yet so entirely depend

ent on me that the whole guilt of remaining unconverted would rest with me; I was so expectant of some mighty, overwhelming influence that would bear me to a point where I could see through the darkness and the discord—an influence which did not come—that I was paralyzed and helpless.

I was early in the church, and saw the solemn groups as they entered and gradually filled the pews. The preachers, too, were early in the desk. Mr. Bedlow sat where he could see me and read my face. I knew that his searching, magnetic eyes were upon me, and in the exalted condition of my sensibilities I felt them. In the great hush that followed the entrance of the crowd and preceded the beginning of the exercises I saw him slowly rise and walk down the pulpit stairs. I had never known anything of his methods, and was entirely unprepared for what followed. Reaching the aisle, he walked directly to where I sat, and raising his finger, pointed it at me and said: "Young man, are you a Christian?"

"I suppose not," I answered.

"Do you ever expect to become one?"

"I do," I replied.

At this he left me, and went to one and another in the congregation, putting his question and making some remark. Sensitive men and women hung their heads, and tried to evade his inquiries by refusing to look at him.

At length he went back to his desk, and said that the church could do no better than to hold for a few minutes a season of prayer, preparatory to the services of the evening; and then he added: "Will some brother pray for a young man who expects to become a Christian, and pray that that expectation may be taken away from him."

Thereupon a young man, full of zeal, kneeled before the congregation and poured out his heart for me, and prayed as he had been asked to pray: that my expectation to become a Christian might be taken away from me. He was, however, considerate and kind enough so far to modify the petition as to beg that I might lose my expectation in the immediate realiza

tion of a Christian experience—that my hope to become a Christian might be swallowed up in my hope of a Christian's reward.

This kindness of the young man, however, to whose zeal and good-will I give hearty honor, could not efface the sore sense of wrong I had suffered at the hand of Mr. Bedlow. Why he should have singled me out in the throng for such an awful infliction I did not know, and why he should have asked anybody to pray that all expectation of becoming a Christian should be taken away from me I could not imagine. I felt that I was misunderstood and outraged, at first, and as my anger died away, or was quenched by other emotions, I found that I was still more deeply puzzled than before. Was I not carefully and prayerfully seeking? And was not this expectation the one thing which made my life endurable? Would I not give all the world to find my feet upon the sure foundation? Had I not in my heart of hearts determined to find what there was to be found if I could, or die?

No: Mr. Bedlow, meaning well no doubt, and desiring to lead me nearer to spiritual rest, had thrust me into deeper and wilder darkness; and in that darkness, haunted by forms of torment and terror, I sat through one of the most impressive sermons and exhortations I had ever heard. I went out of the church at last as utterly hopeless and wretched as I could be. There was a God of wrath above me, because there was the guilt of unfulfilled duty gnawing at my conscience. It seemed as if the great tragedy of the universe were being performed in my soul. Sun, moon, stars, the kingdoms and glory of the world—what were all these, either in themselves or to me, compared with the interests of a soul on which rested the burden of a decision for its own heaven or hell?

As I emerged into the open air, I met Jenks at the door, waiting for me, and as I lifted my hot face I felt the cold rain falling upon it. Pitchy darkness, unrelieved save by the dim lights around the town and the blotched and rapidly melting snow, had settled upon the world. I clutched the old servant's

arm, and struck off in silence towards home. We had hardly walked the distance of a block before there came a flash of blinding lightning, and we were in the midst of that impressive anomaly, a January thunder-storm. It was strange how harmoniously this storm supplemented the influences of the services at the church, from which I had just retired. To me it was the crowning terror of the night. I had no question that it was directed by the same unseen power which had been struggling with me all day, and that it was expressive of His infinite anger. As we hurried along, unprotected in the pouring rain, flash after flash illuminated the darkness, and peal after peal of thunder hurtled over the city, rolled along the heavens, and echoed among the distant hills. I walked in constant fear of being struck dead, and of passing to the judgment unreconciled and unredeemed. I felt that my soul was dealing directly with the great God, and under the play of his awful enginery of destruction I realized my helplessness. I could only pray to him, with gasps of agony, and in whispers: "Oh, do not crush me! Spare me, and I will do anything! Save my life, and it shall be thine!"

When I arrived at the house I did not dare to go in, for then I should be left alone. Without a word I led Jenks to the stable, and, dripping with the rain, we passed in.

"Oh, Jenks," I said, "I must pray, and you must stay with me. I cannot be left alone."

I knelt upon the stable-floor, and the old man, touched with sympathy, and awed by the passion which possessed me, knelt at my side. Oh, what pledges and promises I gave in that prayer, if God would spare my life! How wildly I asked for pardon, and how earnestly did I beseech the Spirit of all Grace to stay with me, and never to be grieved away, until his work was perfected in me!

The poor old man, with his childish mind, could not understand my abandonment to grief and terror; but while I knelt I felt his trembling arm steal around me, and knew that he was sobbing. His heart was deeply moved by pity, but the case

was beyond his comprehension. He could say nothing, but the sympathy was very grateful to me.

And all this time there was another arm around me, whose touch I was too benumbed to feel; there was another heart beside me, tender with sympathy, whose beatings I was too much agitated to apprehend; there was a voice calling to the tempest within me, "Peace! be still!" but I could not hear it. Oh, infinite Father! Oh, loving and pitying Christ! Why could I not have seen thee, as thou didst look down upon and pity thy terror-stricken child? Why could I not have seen thy arms extended toward me, and thy eyes beaming with ineffable love, calling me to thy forgiving embrace? How could I have done thee the dishonor to suppose that the simple old servant kneeling at my side was tenderer and more pitiful than thou?

We both grew chilly at last, and passed quietly into the house. Mrs. Sanderson had retired, but had left a bright fire upon the hearth, at which both of us warmed and dried ourselves. The storm, meantime, had died away, though the lightning still flapped its red wings against the windows, and the dull reverberations of the thunder came to me from the distance. With the relief from what seemed to be the danger of imminent death, I had the strength to mount to my room alone, and, after another prayer which failed to lift my burden, I consigned myself to my bed. The one thought that possessed me as I lay down was that I might never wake if I should go to sleep. My nervous exhaustion was such that when sinking into sleep I started many times from my pillow, tossing the clothes from me, and gasping as if I had been sinking into an abyss. Sleep came at last, however, and I awoke on the morrow, conscious that I had rested, and rejoicing at least in the fact that my day of probation was not yet past. My heart kindled for a moment as I looked from my window into the face of the glorious sun, and the deep blue heaven, but sank within me when I remembered my promises, and felt that the struggle of the previous day was to be renewed.

This struggle I do not propose to dwell upon further in ex-

tended detail. If the record of it thus far is as painful to read as it is to write, the reader will have tired of it already. It lasted for weeks, and I never rationally saw my way out of that blindness. There were literally hundreds in the city who professed to have found a great and superlatively joyous peace, but I did not find it, nor did it come to me in any way by which I dreamed it might come.

The vital point with me was to find some influence so powerful that I could not resist it. I felt myself tossing upon a dangerous sea, just outside the harbor, between which and me there stretched an impassable bar. So, wretched and worn with anxious waiting, I looked for the coming in of some mighty wave which would lift my sinking bark over the forbidding obstacle, into the calm waters that mirrored upon their banks the domes and dwellings of the city of the Great King.

Sometimes I tired of Mr. Bedlow, and went to other churches, longing always to hear some sermon or find some influence that would do for me that which I could not do for myself. I visited my father many times, but he could not help me, beyond what he had already done. One of the causes of my perplexity was the fact that Henry attended the prayer-meetings, and publicly participated in the exercises. I heard, too, that, in a quiet way, he was very influential in his school, and that many of his pupils had begun a religious life. Why was he different from myself? Why was it necessary that I should go through this experience of fear and torment, while he escaped it altogether? All our previous experience had been nearly identical. For years we had been subjected to the same influences, had struggled for the same self-mastery, had kneeled at the same bed in daily devotion; yet here he was, busy in Christian service, steadily rejoicing in Christian hope, into which he had grown through processes as natural as those by which the rose-tree rises to the grace of inflorescence. I see it all now, but then it not only perplexed me, but filled me with weak complaining at my harder lot.

During these eventful weeks I often met Millie Bradford on

her way to and from school. I have no doubt that, from her window, she had made herself familiar with my habits of going and coming, and had timed her own so as to fall in with me.

In communities not familiar with the character and history of a New England revival, it would be impossible to conceive of the universality of the influence which they exert during the time of their highest activity. Multitudes of men neglect their business. Meetings are held during every evening of the week, and sometimes during all the days of the week. Children, gathered in their own little chambers, hold prayer-meetings. Religion is the all-absorbing topic, with old and young.

Millie was like the rest of us; and, forbidden to hear Mr. Bedlow preach, she had determined to win her experience at home. It touches me now even to tears to remember how she used to meet me in the street, and ask me how I was getting along, how I liked Mr. Bedlow, and whether he had helped me. She told me that she and her mother were holding little prayer-meetings together, but that Aunt Flick was away pretty much all the time. She was seeking to become a Christian, and at last she told me that she thought she had become one. I was rational enough to see that it was not necessary for an innocent child like her to share my graver experiences. Indeed, I listened eagerly to her expressions of simple faith and trust, and to her recital of the purposes of life to which she had committed herself. One revelation which she made in confidence, but which I am sure was uttered because she wanted me to think well of her father, interested me much. She said her father prayed very much alone, though he did not attend the meetings. The thought of my old friend toiling in secret over the problem which absorbed us all was very impressive.

Thus weeks passed away, and the tide which rose to its flood began to ebb. I could see that the meetings grew less frequent, and that the old habits of business and pleasure were reasserting themselves. Conversions were rarer, and the blazing fervor of action and devotion cooled. As I realized

this, and, in realizing it, found that I was just as far from the point at which I had aimed as I was at the beginning, a strange, desperate despair seized me. I could hope for no influences in the future more powerful than those to which I had been subjected. The stimulus to resolution and endeavor was nearly expended. Yet I had many times vowed to the Most High that before that season had passed away I would find Him, and, with him, peace, if He and it were to be found. What was I to do?

At last there came a day of in-gathering. The harvest was to be garnered. A great number of men, women, and youth were to be received into the church. I went early, and took a seat in the gallery, where I could see the throng as they presented themselves in the aisles to make their profession of faith and unite in their covenant. When called upon they took their places, coming forward from all parts of the audience in front of the Communion table. Among them were both Henry and Claire. At sight of them I grew sick. Passage after passage of Scripture that seemed applicable to my condition, crowded into my mind. They came from the North and the South and the East and the West, and sat down in the Kingdom of God, and I, a child of the Kingdom, baptized into the name of the Ineffable, was cast out. The harvest was past, the summer was ended, and my soul was not saved! I witnessed the ceremonies with feelings mingled of despair, bitterness, and desperation. On the faces of these converts, thus coming into the fold, there was impressed the seal of a great and solemn joy. Within my bosom there burned the feeling that I had honestly tried to do my duty, and that my endeavors had been spurned. In a moment, to which I had been led by processes whose end I could not see, my will gave way, and I said, "I will try no longer. This is the end." Every resolution and purpose within me was shivered by the fall.

To what depth of perdition I might be hurled—under what judgment I might be crushed—I could not tell, and hardly cared to imagine. Quite to my amazement, I found myself at perfect

peace. What did it mean? Not only was the burden gone, but there thrilled through my soul a quick, strong joy. My spirit was like a broad sea, alive all over with sunlit ripples, with one broad track of glory that stretched across into the unfathomable heaven! I felt the smile of God upon me. I felt the love of God within me. Was I insane? Had satan appeared to me as an angel of light and deceived me? Was this conversion? I was so much in doubt in regard to the real nature of this experience, that when I left the house I spoke to no one of it. Emerging into the open air, I found myself in a new world. I walked the streets as lightly as if wings had been upon my shoulders, lifting me from point to point through all the passage homeward. Ah, how blue the heavens were, and how broad and beautiful the world! What a blessed thing it was to live! How sweet were the faces not only of friends, but even of those whom I did not know! How gladly would I have embraced every one of them! It was as if I had been unclothed of my mortality, and clothed upon with the immortal. I was sure that heaven could hold no joy superior to that.

When passing Mr. Bradford's, I saw Millie at the window. She beckoned to me, and I went to her door. "How is it now?" she said.

"I don't know, Millie," I replied, "but I think it is all right. I never felt before as I do now."

"Oh, I was getting so tired!" said she. "I've been praying for you for days, and days, and days! and hoping and hoping you'd get through."

I could only thank her, and press her little hand; and then I hurried to my home, mounted to my room, shut and locked the door, and sat down to think.

CHAPTER X.

I JOIN A CHURCH THAT LEAVES OUT MR. BRADFORD AND MILLIE.

How shall I write the history of the few weeks that followed my new experience? I had risen, as on wings, from the depths of despair to the heights of hope. I had emerged from a valley of shadows, haunted by ten thousand forms of terror and shapes of anguish, and sat down upon the sunny hills of peace. The world, which had become either mocking or meaningless to me, was illuminated with loving expression in every feature. Far above the deep blue of the winter skies my imagination caught the sheen of winged forms and the far echoes of happy angel-voices. I lifted my face to the sun, and, shutting my eyes, felt the smile of God upon me. Every wind that blew brought its ministry of blessing. Every cloud that swept the sky bore its message of good-will from heaven. I loved life, I loved the world, I loved every living thing I saw, and, more than all, I loved the Great Father who had bestowed upon me such gracious gifts of hope and healing.

Mrs. Sanderson, though she had said little, and had received no confidence from me, had been troubled for many weeks. She had seen in my haggard eyes and weary look the evidences of a great trial and struggle; but without the power to enter into it, or to help me out of it, she had never done more than to ask me if, for my health's sake, it would not be better for me to attend fewer meetings and take more sleep. The weeks that followed were only more satisfactory to her from the conviction that I was happier, for I gave myself with hearty zeal to the work which I felt had been imposed upon me.

My father was happy in my new happiness, never doubting