

CHAPTER LXXXII.

"Calm on the bosom of thy God,
Fair spirit! rest thee now!
E'en while with us thy footsteps trod,
His seal was on thy brow.
Dust to its narrow house, beneath!
Soul to its place on high!
They that have seen thy look in death,
No more may fear to die."

DIRGE BY MRS. HEMANS.

Now surely I am nearly home, my work almost done, my rest almost won,—heaven is very near my soul to-night.

I write with a feeble pen, but a strong heart, my trust is sure, my faith strong as life, thank God, that as I draw near the confines of my earthly existence, all things are so certain and right, so plain and restful to my mortal sight.

Howard my only son, has faded day by day, until—until like a sweet, fragile flower, too pure for earth, the great Reaper has taken him to bloom in the garden of the Celestial city. Day by day, but so gradually with scarce a pang, his life ebbed away,—it was hard for his brothers and sisters to think he was going from their sight, all his fair young life he had been one of God's good things to them, always with his own gaze heavenward, pointing them thither, always helping them "up the mountain."

It is very pleasant to remember that never for one instant was his bright intellect clouded, that never one breath of doubt or mistrust, sullied his perfect faith, "my Father will do so and so, for my Saviour's sake," was the burden of his song in all things small and great, it was the perfection of fitness, for every cross and trial, which met him on his way. One day he said to me with a sweet smile, as I sat alone with him:

"Dear mother, I must tell you something before I go. You can hardly think when you remember how peacefully and tenderly God has dealt with me ever since I lay upon this bed of sickness, that I could have been bitterly rebellious against Him for placing me here, and yet at the first, I was so cruelly grieved, and disappointed, I could see no mercy in it. I see now how wicked I was, meaning to please

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myself, by pleasing God my own way; mamma I meant to have gone out as a missionary as soon as I was sure of myself——"

"Oh Howard, not abroad!"

"Yes to help the poor worn out servants of my Master in Armenia. Oh they are so wearied with the duties of their stations they need help so grievously. It was seeing the way they were obliged to toil and strive, when Clare and I were there, and knowing by my own observation, the need there was of their efforts, which first made me sure I should go into the ministry, and I thought my duty lay there, and I was glad to think I might work there—but God knows best, I might have done only harm by going, so He has prevented it."

"But you never told me this my son."

"It was better not to grieve you before I knew my Master's will, at least I thought so, and you see it was," he replied with a sweet smile, "for I am not going there."

Just then Rolf came in, and for a good while they talked over the plans for the little church at the mills, and Howard left many charges to the people who for more than a year, have listened once every Sabbath to his teachings, then when they were through, Rolf said gently,

"My happy Howard, how near the end you are, only a few more days and you will have passed——"

"The dim and unknown stream,
Which leads at last to the light."

"Yes, very soon, so soon nearly reaching my home—but say that piece to mamma Rolf, she does not know it at all."

"It is something which Howard and I met with yesterday, and liked very much, a poem as beautiful as a psalm, which seemed just to speak to Howard's heart, and mine through him." And he repeated the poem beginning.

"One sweetly solemn thought,
Comes to me o'er and o'er,
I am nearer home to-day,
Than I e'er have been before."

"So beautiful" said Howard when it was ended, "it may be

I'm nearer home 'nearer than even I think,' but it will not be too soon, not too soon," and he sank into a sweet sleep.

That night he died—but so quietly and gently that we never knew the time, once he awoke and seeing us all about him said,

"Lela my queen, sing for me, and then my May-flower will read a Psalm, and Rolf will pray, I almost feel as if to-night was to be the last time we should all join around our household altar."

"Do you wish it dear Howard?" asked Paul, leaning over him tenderly.

"No brother, I have no wishes now, just as He will, it is blessed either way, only, perhaps, to be at rest might be better, yet I cannot tell, I shall be glad either way."

After we had united once more in supplication with Rolf, Howard called Ernest to him.

"Uncle Ernest, God has been so good to you, and yet you hate him."

"No my boy I do not, you do me injustice, only I cannot—and he paused abruptly.

"Cannot give him your heart. Oh Uncle Ernest,—poor little Lillian, how will she ever live a good life, how ever make a joyful end, when—when her guide is blinded by the cares of earth, with no hopes, or desires for heaven? Oh I have asked God to take all wishes from my heart, and I thought he had—but, it is not so, for I have an overwhelming desire, to leave my little sister in safe hands," and he paused exhausted by emotion.

"Oh Howard!" and Ernest covered up his eyes, "I will try my boy, I will try!" and the words broke forth in anguish.

"It will not do, that is not it, you must not try, only go, only say 'I will,' that is the only way, is it not Rolf, we must not wait until we are worthy."

"If I tarry till I'm better
I shall never come at all,"

said Rolf. "Lilly my child do not stand away from his side, he is to be your guardian until life ceases, come here my child," and she came tremblingly and stood beside Ernest laying her head against him. He put one arm round her, but kept his eyes covered.

"The only ones I love who are out of the ark of safety,—the only ones to whom I need say farewell forever," and Howard's tone was very sad, "Good-bye my little sister."

"No, no, my brother, do not cast me off," and the poor girl threw herself in an agony of tears at his side, "I will serve my Saviour, I will meet you and papa up yonder, if He will grant me strength, pray for me brother, and for Ernest."

"And what of you?—shall she go alone?"—

"I will try Howard," came gaspingly from Ernest's white lips.

"Try what?"

"To be worthy, to serve Him as I ought."

"Worthy! worthy a Saviour's dying love, worthy that the Son of God should have lain down his life for you! Oh you cannot be, your worthiness would be as filthiness in the sight of a just God, Rolf pray for him once more, I am too weak.

And he did, just such a prayer as was needed, prevailing in heaven and in the heart of the tortured man, for when he was through and we had arisen, he threw himself upon his knees beside Lillian, and in a voice choked with bitter tears cried.

"Pardon my sins Father, for Christ's sake, grant me the grace of thy holy Spirit, to walk ever before Thee with a perfect heart."

For a moment all was silence, then Howard said softly,

"Mamma you said it might be whenever I would—"

"Yes shall it be now?" and I beckoned Harley Raymond to us.

Without a word he began the marriage service, with a quick startled look, Ernest sprang to his feet, then Paul Marstone lifted Lillian up, and her brothers and sisters gathered about her. Thus was my last daughter wedded.

When it was over Howard said gently,

"Kiss me my brother, and my sister," then turning to me, "another son, mamma," then he said, "raise me up 'Arty,' May dearest, these two are young in the faith, mamma will not stay here long, watch over our youngest child, do not let the cares of this life choke up the good seed: my brothers you are all strong in a good hope,

this new brother is very weak, watch with him day and night, pray with him, until his grain of faith has become a brave, strong tree, whose shadow shall strengthen other drooping hearts," then laying his hands upon their bowed heads, "Ernest and Lillian Wilbur, God's peace be with you! hereafter I will greet you in the New Jerusalem, where we shall meet at the marriage supper of the Lamb.—Now my mother lay your dear cheek against mine, May, my little sister May, my faithful friend and monitor in all the bygone years, clasp my poor weak hand in yours, now with all my dear ones near me, papa in the spirit, and God my Saviour over all, I will sleep and perhaps—I shall wake—wake a free spirit," and he sank to rest.

And thus it was, that when the first roseate-tint of morning touched the mountain tops, and stole softly into the room, where we sat, we knew only a shadow of our beloved was with us, the reality walked the streets of the heavenly city.

I am very near home, this is my last leaf, I shall not turn to another page, my tale is told—the book of my life is nearly closed—God has been very good to me all my life long, blessed be His great and glorious name. Through devious paths I have been led, gently and kindly, a guarded life, a tenderly cared for life has been mine, His grace has kept me.

God has adopted *my* beloved ones, and *their* beloved ones into his glorious family, not one whom I love is missing, He has not caused one sorrow to stay with me, all is peace, so great and glorious, that did I not know the source of all I should wonder that it could be so marvelously like heaven.

The widow's God, will be the orphan's Friend, and we will meet before his Throne—Amen.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

I WHO write the last remaining pages, of this journal am Gracie; a little while before mamma went home, she called me to her, and gave me this book, telling me,

"When I have passed, 'out of the shadow into the sun,' gather all whom I have loved together, and let Stuart read to you the record of your lives."

We loved mamma so dearly, we have thought of her so many years as almost an angel, that now when at last she is what she has so long seemed to be, we do not weep for her, a few bitter tears will come, but they are for ourselves—for the loneliness which the wanting her dear presence leaves.

After our brother died she rarely left her room, save only with one of my brother's arms about her, each night she walked along one of the long corridors to a western window to see the sunset, it was an old custom, which she and papa always had of seeing the sun dip into the river from this window, and whenever she was at "Percies' Cliffe," she never omitted the going there; we called it "mamma's window," it will be its name always.

Long ago, it had been one of the brightest hours of mamma's bright days to sit, papa and she alone, in some quiet nook, oftenest in summer time, in the little marble grotto, which stands upon a rock at the river's brink, and talk over a thousand pleasant things,—afterwards when our dark days were upon us, dark in some things, bright in others,—she had always gone to her little room, at twilight, and we learned to think it was very a holy time, and we always hushed our play and gathered around May, as she bade us, and were quiet listening to her stories until mamma's sweet face came at the door, once more, dear mamma! Birdie grows more like her in every thing—even in heavenly beauty, Rolf Livingstone's treasured wife. Oh we used to be thankful because we had papa's face left us in Lela's haughty beauty, but now we are I think, more grateful than even that, for Birdie's face.

Through all her illness—nay it was not illness—but while she was fading from our midst—we used always to leave her at the usual time because our sister May said it was better, and then when her bell rang, we

gathered from all parts of the house to her room for prayers.

But last Sabbath eve we waited a long, long while, but she did not summon us. Just when our hearts were aching with intense dread, Paul said:

"Marion dear, go to your mother, it is better not to wait longer."

Then when she had gone a moment she came back again, and beckoning with her hand,

"Come," she said, that was all, but we knew at once what it was. When we reached the door, May turned with the sweet smile which is her chief blessing, and looking upon the sorrowful company that followed her said: "Softly my brothers and sisters, it is holy ground."

And oh it was, for kneeling before her desk, her hands clasped upon her open Bible, and her sweet face laid upon them, was our dead mother, the moonbeams making a halo over her as she knelt.

Tenderly Stuart and Clare laid her upon her couch, and we stood reverentially about her, in unbroken silence until Harley Raymond, (who was with us the first time for many days, because Dora is sick almost unto death,) said in a solemn voice:

"So He giveth his beloved rest."

Then when Lillian would have wept over our departed saint, Adèle said quickly: "Not so Lilly, she would not like that you should weep," and the tears were driven back.

"Let us have worship now," said Cora, "it will be sweet to send our prayers above just while they are singing their songs of gladness before the Throne."

And around our pale, cold mother we offered our evening oblation.

This was four days ago, to day we buried her beside her beloved, at their feet rests all that is earthly of their son, our only brother, the last of our race who bore the name—his grave was made four months ago. Our father, our mother, our only brother sleep!

We who are left love each other well, our hearts were knit very close in times of desolation, and of trial, and now when the full tide of prosperity flows around us, we only love the more.

Dora Raymond was our dear friend, mamma's dear friend,

and she is going swiftly but surely into an early grave, stricken by the hand of a disease which bore away the life of both her parents, but when we look upon the pale consumptive's face, there is such a glory of heavenly hope, we forget to mark the other lines which suffering has written thereon.

When mamma's death made me more desolate than all the rest, I would have liked to have gone to Ingleside, and spent the rest of my life helping Adèle, she wants me so sadly, but May says, no,

"You must stay in the old home, my sister Grace, and watch over Lillian, as I cannot hope to with my many other cares, your duty is here, among mamma's poor, in her last earthly home."

And so we four, Aunt Estelle, my brother and sister, (Dr. and Mrs. Wilbur,) and myself live in the homestead, and will together strive to fill in some slight measure the place of our angel mother.

Full of hopes, of fears, of joys, and tender love, we children of Walter and Bertha Percy, in happy homes, await the summons which shall call us from time to eternity, from the fleeting, uncertain pleasures of earth, to the perfect peace of Heaven.

The motto of our race is "Espérance,"—the language of our hearts is "Espérance,"—hope for the time when from the perishable joys of earth we shall win the imperishable joys of heaven! O Espérance! O Percy!

THE END.