

SNOW WATER,

AND OTHER

Gospel Narratives.

By X.

THIRD EDITION.

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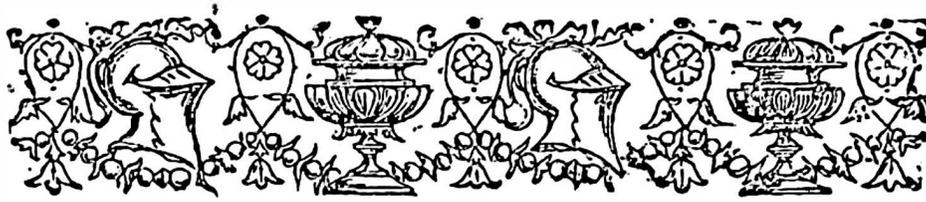
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SNOW WATER.

“**A**RE you not ashamed to deceive a dying girl like that? Have you no more pity in you than to try to hurry her straight into hell at once, as well as go there yourself by and bye?”

The words themselves were strong and startling, but the voice that uttered them was so passionately vehement, so almost vindictive in its tone, that I turned well-nigh bewildered to see from whence it proceeded.

I had been sitting by the bedside of a

young woman whose days, I had almost said hours, I believed, were numbered, and had been bending closely over her that her fast-failing strength might not be tired by the exertion of speaking out, so that I had not noticed, in the engrossing interest of our conversation, that any one else had entered the room. Judge, therefore, of my surprise when, on pausing for a reply to something I had just said, the words I have quoted above fell on my ear—a surprise certainly not lessened by finding a woman sitting so near as to be absolutely touching me, and who had evidently been seated thus for some time, listening to what had passed, as her subsequent remarks showed.

And what do you suppose had thus kindled the anger of our unexpected visitor till it blazed forth in words of wrath and bitterness? Had I been speaking daring

blasphemy, or seeking to make the dying girl believe there was no God and no Satan, no heaven or hell, no future to hope for or to dread, or if there were a future at all, one which would bring happiness alike to all at some time or other ?

No, it was nothing of this kind ; I had been reading in Exodus xii. of the paschal lamb, slain on that wondrous night in Egypt, the blood of which, sprinkled on the houses of the Israelites, had been sufficient to keep death and judgment out, when swift destruction, from which there was no escape, filled the houses of the Egyptians with terror and dismay, and each family mourned with bitter agony the loss of the one who had been its glory and its pride.

I had sought to explain to the sick girl that this distinction between Israelite and Egyptian was not on the ground of the one

being better than the other, but because God had said, "When I see the blood I will pass over," and thus the Israelite was secure through the word of God and the sprinkled blood of the slain lamb, and that had any Egyptian taken advantage of the blood, he, too, would have been as safe as the Israelite, because the eye of God rested on the blood He Himself had provided, not on the trembling sinner sheltered behind it. We had turned then to John i. 30, and she listened to John the Baptist's testimony concerning the blessed Lord Jesus, that He was the one to whom this type pointed, God's Lamb, provided not for a nation only, but for the sin of the world.

Then in 1 John i. 7, I had read to her how all-availing His blood is, "The blood of Jesus Christ his" (God's) "Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Anna (for such was the dying girl's name) saw there was safety, saw there was a shelter from the wrath of God against sin, saw God had provided a lamb, but she wanted to know that the blood of that slain lamb sheltered her; she had "no right to it," she said; she had "only sinned, and now she had no time left for good works, or to do anything to fit her for God."

Afraid, in that solemn moment, to speak my own words, or to give her anything but God's word to rest upon, I had then read to her how the Lord Jesus had said, when He was upon earth, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance," and that those same blessed lips had also said that "Whosoever believeth in him" (not doeth good works) "should not perish but have everlasting life," and finally that the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans these

wonderful words, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth" (not the godly but) "the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." At the end of that verse I had paused a moment, and said in a low tone to her, "The salvation you long for cost God His only begotten Son, it cost the Lord Jesus His life, His blood, His shame, and agony, to purchase it, but it cost you and me nothing at all, we have only to stretch out our hands and take it, and thank Him for it. Is not that a simple way of getting it?"

I had barely asked the question, the last words of it indeed were still trembling on my lips, when the unexpected interruption came. For a moment I was speechless. The attack on me personally was a trifle, but I was in dismay about the one lying dying by my side. She was hovering be-

tween life and death, between time and eternity, she had not hold of Christ as her Saviour, she thought good works a sure foundation, though she had none on which to build, and I thought, surely Satan has shot this arrow at this moment, for I felt in an instant that it was the testimony of God's word to there being "no difference" between men, because "all have sinned," and to the freeness of God's salvation, as His gift, apart from any claim or any worthiness of ours, that had so aroused Satan's enmity and the woman's anger. Utterly helpless, I turned where alone help was to be found, to the living God, beseeching Him who knew, all the weakness and all the need, to come in and defeat Satan and rescue his prey from his grasp, even though he had come like a wild beast seeking to devour.

In that one moment of casting the dying

girl upon the living God as His care, He gave me quiet confidence that He had taken it as His concern, and so all fear departed. What rest, what peace it is when He whispers deep down in the heart, whatever the anxiety is, "Leave that with me, my child, that is my affair."

During that moment, and it was but a moment, of quiet, the woman, whose face and name were alike unknown to me, eyed me curiously, as, having turned round, we met face to face. Then I said, "Is it deception to give any one God's word, and the Lord Jesus Christ's work to rest upon?"

With an instinctive feeling that this was Satan's attack, through the woman, I could not shorten His precious name, or call Him anything but the Lord Jesus Christ, it seemed a delight to call Him Lord as well as Jesus the Saviour.

“ Yes, it is,” the woman answered with a burst of almost fury, “ you made it an easy thing to get to heaven, and you said we had nothing to do for salvation, and that one person was as bad as another, and if that is what you believe and make that poor girl believe, you will awake from your folly in the depths of hell and meet your victim there, but it will be worse for you than for her.”

“ It is God says it, not I,” I answered; “ have you read the Bible for yourself? ”

“ No,” she said, “ and you had better not have the ignorant wrest it to their own destruction. No one can understand it except those ordained of the Church to understand it, but I thank God I have been better taught than you what it says.”

“ Well,” I said, “ will you explain to me this verse in Romans iii. 24, ‘ Being justified

freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus?" I know I am very ignorant; but I cannot understand, 'freely' in any other sense than that we are to pay no price at all for it, if I had anything to pay it would not be free; and, 'by His grace' means to me by His favour, and it would be no favour if I had earned it; and 'through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' always seems to me the enormous price that another has paid in order that I might get that salvation free. It was too great a work for me to do a bit of, and so God did it all Himself, and therefore it is perfect, and one touch of mine would only spoil it."

"Do you mean to tell me you have nothing to do for salvation?" the woman answered.

"The Lord Jesus Christ said, 'It is finished,' and I believe Him," I replied,

“and will not you too rest on His finished work?”

“No, indeed,” said she; “plenty would get to heaven if they could get there in your easy way.”

“How do you propose that I should get there?” I asked.

“Oh,” she said, “you must work, and work, and work, and pray, and pray, and pray, and do penance for your sins, and go on working, and praying, and doing penance till you die, and then your soul will still have to be purified, and you must wait till the day of judgment to know if you have worked, and prayed, and done penance enough.”

Shuddering at the gloom of such a prospect I answered, “But God says, ‘To him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly.’”

“ Yes, but the apostle James says, ‘ Faith without works, is dead, ’ ” she replied.

“ I know he does, but he is not contradicting the apostle Paul, who says, ‘ being justified by faith.’ Faith justifies before God, works justify before men. ‘ He that believeth hath everlasting life.’ Works cannot purchase life but are the movements of life. God looks into the heart and sees the faith, men look on the outward ways, and if they see no movement of life say ‘ The man is dead: there is no breath, no word, no sign of life about him.’ ”

“ I cannot work my soul to save,
For that my Lord hath done,
But I may work like any slave
From love to God’s dear Son.”

“ But my religion is,” the woman answered, “ that you must be purified and get white, white, white as snow, before you can get to heaven.”

“Yes,” I said, “not only as white as snow, but whiter than snow, before either you or I can be fit for God’s presence, for Job says, ‘If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me.’ Snow water is not purifying enough, and that is the purest thing earth knows.”

“Then how are you going to get purified except by prayers and good works?” she said, softening slightly for the first time.

“David said, ‘Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.’ You and I both see our need of being cleansed, the difference is, you expect your own works can do it, and I believe nothing but the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can avail to cleanse me, and what is more I know it has cleansed me, and that the hell you spoke of just now will never be my portion, no never, for God’s word and

the blood of His Son stand between me and it, and over those barriers Satan's hand can never stretch to reach me."

Once more her dark eyes gleamed with anger and hatred. "Do not let that poor girl hear you speak such blasphemy," she said, "your presumption is only adding to your sin and folly. The very best saint can not know he is saved till the judgment day."

"Pardon me, God says that is the privilege of even the babes in Christ, and God took the trouble to write a letter in order that every poor sinner who trusts in His Son might know and enjoy the certainty of salvation now. Listen to His words from your own Bible," and, opening the Douay version, I read to her 1 John v. 13, "These things I write to you, that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe

in the name of the Son of God.” “It is even more plainly put in your version than in mine. Is it then blasphemy to believe God? Moreover, I would rather enter heaven having the blood of God’s own dear Son as my only right and title, than go there through my own good works, if they would take me, which they never could. I would rather go as God’s invited guest than pay for an entrance there if pay I could—and will not you? Let your own righteousness, which He calls ‘filthy rags’ go, and trust His precious blood instead.”

The woman did not answer me, but rose from her seat in the chimney corner, and moving slowly towards the door, went out muttering something which did not reach my ear.

As the door closed behind her, I turned round again to the dying girl. Large tear

drops stood in her eyes, and rolled silently down her cheeks, but the restless, anxious, despairing look had gone. She put out her thin wasted hand and laid it gently on mine. "I am afraid this has been too much for you, I am so sorry," I said.

"Oh, not for me, not for me, do not be sorry for me," she answered, "the long dark night is over, I see it all, God gave His Son, Jesus gave His own precious blood, that I might be saved . . . and then He wrote a letter that I might be certain about it now . . . Its for 'him that worketh not;' oh, what love. The only thing that hurt me was to have you spoken to so, and I was so afraid you could not possibly come back again . . . and yet it was just what passed that made it all clear to me . . . Each moment more light seemed to come and chase away my former dark thoughts."

It was easy to assure her how delighted I should be to come back, and that my only anxiety had been that the Lord would give me the right scriptures, and keep me very calm for her sake.

“And He did, He did,” she said so earnestly, “bit by bit, as you read verse after verse, He showed me from His word that all I had believed before was a lie, that Satan had deceived me into thinking that God was a hard God, who needed our toil and our strivings and our tears, and even then was not always to be appeased, and now I see it is ‘freely by his grace’ we get it all, instead of hardly by our works; will you read me that verse again?”

How differently I felt as I read that verse for the second time that morning, for wonder and joy and praise filled my heart at the way the Lord had taken to give a soul a sight

of Himself, using even the very hatred and opposition of the enemy to work out His own purposes of love.

Fear of the long eternity so close at hand for her, dismay at the thought of the frail thread on which her life hung, dread of the righteous God whom she knew she must meet in that unknown future, and whom she thought a hard God, and her judge, had been filling her mind and making the weeks of her illness a time of unspeakable anguish. She had never been told that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. In her blindness she imagined she had to grope about to find Him, to work her way to Him, if she could, while He looked on from heaven unpityingly, only ready to condemn each failure. You, who have listened to the sweet story of the gospel again and again, perhaps from your infancy, who have heard of the love and

tender compassion of God, every day of your lives, and of His willingness to receive you, and have only been careless and indifferent about it hitherto, cannot imagine how, like water to a thirsty soul, the blessed news came to her, that God was ready to save her, willing to have her just as she was, and to give her everything she needed out of His own fulness.

She discovered now that the ransom needed to rescue her soul was mightier far than anything she had dreamed of, but that it had been paid already to the last farthing by another and she had not hopelessly to begin to try and work it out, and the discovery was perfect rest to her, and deep abiding peace.

It was very pleasant to visit her in the days that followed. She lived near to me, and I could see her each day, and it seemed

as though day by day her soul grew in grace, and in the knowledge of the person of the One who had redeemed her.

Every passage of the word of God was so fresh to her; it was not only that it seemed new, but it was new to her, for she had not known even the letter of it.

It was very refreshing to watch its effects, especially when I read to her those words beyond compare, that tell of Jesu's agony, His shame, of the crown of thorns and the purple robe, of the taunting and the spitting, and then of the cross itself and the hours of darkness, of that awful cry wrung from the patient, suffering, holy lips of the God-man, of the piercing of that blessed side, and the grave.

I was ashamed that I had voice to read it aloud when she was so deeply moved.

More than once she hid her face in her

hands and large tear drops trickled slowly through the half-closed fingers, while again and again I heard her murmur, as though speaking to One unseen, "For me, for me . . . I have lived to be twenty and never knew it before, Lord . . . Thou didst suffer for me . . . even me."

The story of the resurrection and the ascension, of Paul's sight of the Lord in the glory, and His coming again, these were all very favourite passages with her. No doubt or cloud ever crossed her soul to mar her joy and peace, and the scriptures she loved best were not those that spoke of her own blessing, but those that spoke most of the Lord Himself.

Consumption with her had taken a form of very special suffering, at times terrible to witness even, and yet when I spoke of the suffering, a smile would cross her face

and more than once she repeated in a soft low tone—

“Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are.”

Each day soon after I went to her, which was always at the same hour, the same woman who had been so angry the first day, crept quietly in the moment I began to read, as though she had watched her opportunity, and took a seat behind me, and then just as I was closing the book, as quietly slipped away again without a word.

As she seemed to wish to escape notice, I never spoke to her, fearing she would not come back if she knew I saw her, and glad she should thus listen to God's own life-giving word.

For several weeks this went on, the one soul ripening fast for glory, the other hearkening at any rate to the words of life, while

to me these were weeks of real blessing. The woman's strange conduct never varied, she never entered till the reading had commenced, and left invariably as I was closing the book. Her presence kept me even more dependant on the Lord, for I desired earnestly that His word should be to her a "savour of life unto life," and therefore that He should guide as to the portion, as well as bring it home to her conscience and heart.

Meantime, with Anna, each week brought more suffering of body and less strength to meet it, but as the body grew daily weaker, so in proportion did her joy at the thought of being with the Lord increase.

Death was robbed of all its terror for her. "It is only a short journey," she said, "to reach the side of the One who loves us best, and if the road is rough, I shall not feel the roughness, and it cannot be dark, for His

hand will support me, and His presence will light me through." And truly it did!

I was with her as usual the morning of her death, and as usual our strange guest came in for the reading, and went out as it ended, leaving my last hour with Anna undisturbed.

Very much we both enjoyed that hour, though I did not then think it was the last we should spend together on earth, for she seemed stronger and brighter than she had been for days, and was very unwilling to let me go away, so unwilling that I sat on for some time after I would not let her speak or even listen any more, just with her hand in mine.

Even after I reached the door of her room I turned back again to her bedside, for her eyes rested on me with such a loving wistful look.

“Were you wanting to say something, Anna, dear?”

“No” she said, “not exactly . . . I was only thinking how I have watched that door every morning for you . . . and I was thinking if this is the last time I shall see you here . . . that I shall see you and know you . . . the very moment you come home . . . What will it be to meet you next with Jesus! . . . I think . . . even then . . . I shall be glad . . . to see you come.”

The sunlight was playing around her face, but the light upon it was something more than the light of the sun. It put me in mind of that verse in the Revelation, “the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Unconsciously I repeated the verse aloud.

“Yes,” she said . . . “the Lamb slain

. . . slain for you . . . for me . . . I shall see Him soon, . . . and see those marks . . . oh, what love is His."

For a moment we were both silent, then I stooped down and kissed her once more. Though apparently she was no worse, her whole manner now impressed me with the feeling that it was for the last time.

When I got out into the fresh air I tried to reason myself out of the feeling that I should not see her again on earth, and partly succeeded; yet I went earlier the next morning. On the door-step I met our strange visitor. Her face was pale and her eyes showed traces of weeping. She paused a moment, and looking round, said in a quick half-frightened tone, "Snow water is not enough to cleanse, nor filthy rags to clothe, but the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is enough for everything." She was gone in

a moment, and I never saw or heard of her afterwards.

I went into the house wondering, and was going as usual up to Anna's room, but her friends met me, and told me she had gone to be with the Lord.

“It was yesterday, soon after you left,” they explained; “when we went into the room there was a look and a smile on her face that did not seem earthly. ‘What is it?’ we asked, but she only smiled again and whispered, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.’ She never spoke after, and not one of us knew the exact moment when her spirit fled—the smile is upon her face still—will you see her?”

Thus the Lord brought her to Himself down here, and took her to be with Him up there, and in the meantime enabled her so to witness for Him, that the impression

made on those who loved and nursed her will, I believe, never be effaced.

Truly, dear reader, as the woman said, "Snow water is not enough to cleanse, nor filthy rags to clothe, but the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is enough for everything, for time and for eternity." Have you trusted it yet?



TOO GOOD FOR JESUS.



TOO GOOD FOR JESUS.

FOR many weeks I had been visiting regularly in one special ward of the — Hospital, but though I was in the ward always once, often twice during the week, there was one bed that I had always passed by, or rather, I should say, I had never spoken to its occupant.

Sometimes the patient in it was asleep, sometimes her head was turned away and her eyes closed as soon as I came near the bed, at other times she would call a nurse to do something for her at that very mo-

ment, but at all times there was on her face a cold, hard, stony look that seemed only varied by a satirical smile, and which effectually deterred me from trying to speak to her.

Often I left flowers, occasionally a Gospel story on the little locker by her bedside, now and then, when I heard her coughing much, I had put some grapes there too as I passed out of the ward ; but, even if awake, she never showed by sign or sound of any kind that she had heard me, and it was almost a relief to me that no one had called my special attention to her, so repelled was I by the expression of her face.

She was a woman of nine-and-twenty, with fine regular features, a broad forehead, and large grey eyes. It was an intelligent face, that you saw at once ; but its cold, cynical expression made it anything but a pleasing one.

Possibly, had the ward been a smaller one, it would have troubled me more to pass her by thus week after week, but it was very large, and so many were eagerly looking for a visit. Some because they knew the Lord, and it comforted them to be spoken to of Him whom their souls loved; others because they were thirsting for the water of life, yet could not believe that all they had to do was to drink it, for it was flowing freely all around them. Others again, though really caring for none of these things, were sick and lonely, and sometimes friendless too, and a friendly voice and words of sympathy, or a listening ear to their tales of suffering and woe, brought a little bit of sunlight to cheer them, or, at any rate, varied the monotony of the day, and made them willing to hear of one Friend, the Friend of sinners, whose

ear was ever open to them, who was listening for their cry of need to go up to Him, who wanted not merely to help, but to save them.

Thus it was that, in my interest in others, any uneasy feeling which would creep in at times, about passing by the one bed, was quieted ; besides I argued with myself, hers was not at all an urgent case. It was thought in the ward that she was getting better.

In this way weeks rolled on, till at last I felt thoroughly uneasy at being afraid to speak one word for Jesus because of a hard look and the possibility of a hard word. I am sure it was Satan seeking to keep a door closed against the Lord Jesus, so I asked that blessed Lord Himself to open the door and clear the way if He had any message to give me to carry to that sick woman, and

to keep me listening to Him so as to get His own message.

Then came a deep sense of the nothingness of the messenger, and the greatness of the message, that it was EVERYTHING, that His words were Spirit and life, though uttered by ever so slow and stammering a tongue, that I had only to carry His own precious written words, and leave Him to do all the rest.

Now that I was looking for an opened door, I had not long to wait. The Lord opened it simply enough, thus rebuking me for so long trying to force it open myself, instead of asking Him to do it in His own appointed way.

I had taken into the ward, one day, some flowers in flower-pots, at the special request of one of the nurses, who came down the ward, as we entered, to take them from my

hand and that of the friend who was with me. I had just reached the foot of the bed in which Margaret A—— was lying, when the nurse came up, and as she expressed her great admiration of the flowers, she turned to her patient and said, “I will put this one,” taking up a lovely little rose-tree, “opposite your bed, and then you will get the benefit of it.” At the same moment I turned and asked, “Are you fond of flowers.” “Yes, very,” she answered, and, as the nurse moved on with the rest of her treasures, I drew a chair up to the bedside and began to ask her some simple questions as to her health. She answered these freely enough, told me that she was getting better, and hoped soon to be out, that she had nearly died when she first came in, indeed had never expected to be better again, but now she thought she only needed to get up her strength.

It was really consumption she was suffering from, though she evidently did not know it then, or did not believe it if she had been told such was the case.

We talked a little of her bodily state, and then I said, "You spoke just now very calmly of expecting death, would it have been a friend or an enemy to you?"

"Oh, a friend, certainly," she said, "I have nothing much to live for; I have buried all I loved best on earth. Not but what I have those who love me, and are kind to me, still living," she added in a sort of proud, self-contained manner, as though to say, "Do not for a moment imagine I am an object of pity, even though I have told you my trouble."

"It is terrible agony to lose those we love best," I said. "I, too, have known that sorrow."

She softened a little now, evidently she felt we were on common ground. Pity she would have none of, even sympathy she seemed inclined to resent, as though she feared it might border too closely on pity; but against some one who had felt the same as she had, she need not arm herself, or put out bristles. Of course she did not say all this in words, but it was plain to me then she felt it, and in after days, when speaking of our first meeting, she frankly owned these had been her feelings.

For a moment there was silence between us, then she told me a little, a very little of her loved and lost ones, adding, "To those who have lost all that made earth a Paradise, how can death be anything but a friend?"

"Then you have no fear of death?"

"No, why should I; I have suffered as

much pain already as I should probably suffer if I died.”

“I did not mean fear of the bodily suffering of death,” I said; “but have you no shrinking from what comes after death—are you safe for eternity?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, coldly. “Why should I not be safe?”

“There is only one ground of safety,” I answered; “the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Are you safe under the shelter of His precious blood?”

“I am safe,” she said, “because I never did any harm in my life: I never did anything to make me deserve to go to hell. I was taught religion from my cradle. I have done my duty always, and more than my duty. I went to church, read my Bible, and said my prayers, and worked hard to support

myself respectably, and I thank God I have done it. I could not call myself a sinner even in church, as people do, because I do not feel I am one. I have been always moral and religious.”

For some moments I sat in silence, almost bewildered by this long list of virtues, all well remembered and rested securely on as quite sufficient to meet the claims of a perfectly holy God, who cannot look upon sin, and in whose sight the thought of foolishness is sin, who “charges his angels with folly,” and before whom the heavens are not clean. My mind wandered off to what God’s thoughts of sin are, as expressed and measured by the cross of His Son, and the cry of that Holy One when sin, the sin of others, was laid on Him, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” Almost without knowing what I was saying, I

murmured "I am so sorry for you, so sorry for you."

"Why?" she asked, sharply.

"Oh, because Jesus could not have died for you, and it is the blessedest thing in all the world to know that Jesus died for me."

"Why do you say He did not die for me?" she asked, still more offended; "I have prayed to Him all my life."

"Because you are too good for Jesus. He died for *sinners*, and you say you are not a sinner, you have no interest in Him, for you are secure of heaven through your own good life. So He need not have left His home, veiled His glory, and come down here and suffered and died, for you do not need Him. Christ died for the ungodly, and you are not ungodly. The Son of Man came to seek *the lost*, but you are not lost. Oh, I am so sorry for you. I would not for

worlds be out of the number that Jesus died for.”

“ I cannot say I am a sinner when I am not, and I cannot say I have led a bad life when I have led a good one,” she replied ; then added abruptly, “ Good-bye, I am tired now,” and summarily and unceremoniously she would have ended our interview ; but in spite of the now closed eyelids, as though refusing further conversation on the subject, I said, “ I will read you a verse or two of God’s Word about this, and you need not weary yourself by answering me, but alone with God ponder which is right—God or you. I read: “ There is *none* righteous, *no*, *not one*.”

“ There is *none* that understandeth, there is *none* that seeketh after God.”

“ They are *all* gone out of the way ; they are together become unprofitable ;

there is *none* that doeth good, *no, not one.*”

“Therefore, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”

“But now the righteousness of God without law is manifest . . . even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Christ Jesus, unto all, and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference.”

“For *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

“This is man’s side of the picture, all sin, all badness; and now look at God’s side, all love, all goodness. ‘But God commendeth his love toward us, in that *while* we were yet *sinner*s, Christ died for us.’ ”

In spite of the closed eyelids, I could tell by her face she was listening; but there came no answer, and leaving a little book called “Abraham believed God” by the side

of the flowers on her locker—she had a Bible of her own—I passed on to the other end of the ward, asking the Lord to let His own Word do its work in her heart, and shake her out of her false rest, her false security.

Later in the afternoon, as I again passed her bed on my way out, I noticed that her eyes were open, and she was watching me, with an anxious look on her face, but I did not stop, or speak again, wanting to leave her alone with the Word of God, and feeling that any words of mine, or any argument, could but weaken the power of that precious Word. A week passed away before I saw her again, a week, during which she had been constantly in my thoughts, and I alternately desired and dreaded the day to come for me to go to that ward again. I was interested in the woman, and yet I shrank from going back to her.

It had seemed comparatively easy to tell people, who were anxious to be saved, of a Saviour who was willing to be *their* Saviour, or even to warn of danger and coming judgment those who knew and owned they were sinners, and to entreat them not to linger or delay ; but here was one resting peacefully in fancied security, not merely unconscious of danger, but disbelieving the very possibility of it. I trembled lest anything I might say should lull her still, and would gladly have sent a friend in my place : but my friend had others she had promised to see, and had no time, so in conscious weakness I entered that ward, and went straight up to her bed.

She was sitting up in bed, wide awake now, and evidently expecting me. The self-satisfied look was gone from her face, and an anxious enquiring expression had taken its place. She seemed relieved that I came

at once to her, and as I sat down, said, in a low hurried tone, "I was very rude to you last time."

I could see how much it cost a proud spirit like hers to say even those few words, and felt as though it must be the Lord who had broken her down, and therefore that He must have commenced a work in her.

"Never mind," I said; "would you like me to stay a little while with you to-day and read?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "I have had no rest for days, for though I pretended not to listen, those verses of Scripture have never been out of my head since. I thought I was good enough, and I find I am a sinner. I thought I had a better chance of heaven than most, though, of course, nobody can know for certain, and I find I have no chance at all. I was so

angry with you when you said you were so sorry for me, that Jesus could not have died for me; but the words have haunted me all the time."

I could only say "Thank God."

"Why do you thank God?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Because He has brought you off the ground on which there was no hope for you, on to ground where Jesus can meet you and save you. Before you shut Christ out by your goodness, now, you have taken the place of a lost sinner, you are the very one for Jesus, for He is Jehovah the Saviour."

She only looked hard at me. The wrong thoughts of years were slowly being dispelled; but it seemed as though the darkness disputed every inch of ground with the light.

"You made two great mistakes just now,"

I added, seeing she did not speak. "You said nobody could know for certain, and that you found you had no chance at all. Now God speaks *certainly*. He says, 'Whosoever believeth on Him'—*i.e.*, on Christ Jesus—'shall not perish but have everlasting life'—that He *is passed* from death unto life. So you *can* know for certain. And Jesus says 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out'; *i.e.*, every one that comes He receives; so that makes room for you."

Her eyes had a far-away look in them; as though gazing at something which was before her soul. "God says it," she said; "and I am to be like Abraham, and believe it, though it seems impossible, and God will think more of that than of all the good life I boasted in. Is that it?"

I wondered for a moment at her reference

to Abraham. She saw my surprised look, and explained, "That little book you left, I read it—I read it over and over again; so much in it suits me. Abraham took his true place." Then breaking down utterly, pride, reserve, self-righteousness, everything gone, she burst into tears, and cried, "I *am* a sinner, I want to be saved, I want Jesus."

My heart was full. I could scarcely keep from crying too. It was with choking voice I said, "He says, 'Look unto me and *be* ye saved.' *Jesus wants you.*" "I do look. I *do* believe," she answered, and presently added, "The little book said that too 'Look unto me,' 'Look now.' Is that all I have to do? Is God satisfied?"

"Perfectly. You look at Jesus, God looks at Jesus. It is not your looking, though look you must: it is *Jesus* that satisfies God, the one you look at.

“Yes, yes,” she murmured, “the perfect sacrifice who was delivered for *our* offences,” and there was a long, long pause ; I could not break it.

After a time she said, “But what about to-morrow, I have a bad temper, and I take things hardly if they go wrong.”

“Shall I tell you,” I said, “what a man of God said to me once, ‘The first look at Christ is life, and every after look at Him is the power of living’ Do you understand ?”

“I think I do,” she said. “We get saved when we first look to Jesus, and while we keep on looking at Jesus, we live and talk like people who are saved, then when I feel I am getting wrong, I am iust to look back to Him.”

“Yes. Consider Him, and listen to Him. ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,’ He says.”

“ Yes, I see, its to be all Jesus—all Jesus, this *is* rest.”

And so after years of fancied security, and a week of agony in the presence of realised danger, He made her to lie down in the green pastures, and led her beside the still waters which He Himself had provided, comforted her with His own voice, and led her on by it too. Much passed between us, that in this brief space it is impossible to record, both at the time and in the months that followed, showing how deeply the Word of God cut into her very soul. My visits to her were full of the deepest interest to me. She lived three months longer. For weeks neither she nor I had any thought of her dying. She seemed to gain strength, her appetite improved, and she gained flesh too, was up, and dressed, and moving about the ward,

half of each day, sometimes reading to the other patients, sometimes speaking a few words in her shy reserved way, of the Saviour she had found, and doing many a little act of kindness for one and another of them.

She read much of God's Word, fed on it, and her soul caught the hope of the Lord's coming to fetch His people, and gloried in it. In the ward I had heard of her always from the nurses, as the most troublesome and exacting of patients, and the patients had spoken of her as selfish, and bad tempered, and disagreeable. Now everyone was talking of the change. The nurses could not understand it, she seemed so very grateful for the smallest attention, and so unwilling to give trouble; while her fellow patients were constantly speaking of the wonderful change that had come over her, and of how good and kind she was to all

whom she could help. The woman in the next bed, who was a Christian, told me that all through one night—which I found was the very night of the day on which she had found Jesus—she herself had slept very little, and had heard Margaret singing in a low voice to herself, “I, the chief of sinners am, but Jesus died for me,” over and over again, “And so, Ma’am,” she said, “I thought that must be the reason of the change, that she had found out two things, herself as a sinner, and Jesus as her Saviour.”

Some weeks passed on thus, and then she suddenly broke down in health, and from that day failed rapidly. Very calm she was, and restful. It hardly seemed a surprise to her, and her desire increased to see the Lord and be with Him. “How He bore with me,” she used to say; “He the Holy One bore with my pride and folly, with my looking

down on my neighbours. When I heard you read and speak of sin, as though you had felt it, to some of the others, I wondered what very wicked things you had done, and prided myself afresh on my own, as I thought, spotless life, and all the time the Lord saw me as I was, bad altogether, bad all the way through. Oh, how bitter it was to me that first day to find out what you said was true, that I must be a sinner or I had no claim on Jesus. How sweet it is now to know that it was just for such sinners Jesus died.

‘Thousand, thousand thanks to Thee;
Jesus, Lord for ever be!’”

I saw her the last day of her life; she had wasted then almost to a skeleton, she was propped up in bed, her breathing very hard and distressing, and large drops were trickling down her face, yet her expression

was still calm and peaceful. She was too far gone for me to speak many words to her. Bending over her, I said—

“ You are nearly home.”

A smile broke over her face, a sunny smile. “ Near Him,” she answered ; “ Jesus . . . died . . . for me . . . a sinner . . . going . . . to Him.”

“ They shall see His face,” I whispered.

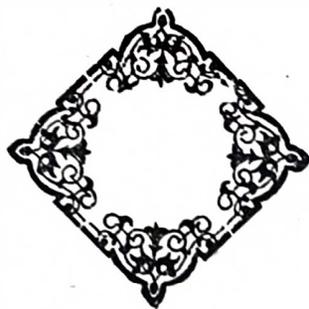
“ One . . . verse . . . more,” she said, and I quoted,—“ Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me : for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

She smiled once more—a glad smile—and looked up at me, too exhausted now to speak again.

In the night-time, towards daybreak, her night ended for ever, and her morning was

the sunlight of His own presence. Quietly she passed to be with Jesus, His own name the last on her lips.

“ This Man receiveth sinners.”



“TWO DIED FOR ME.”



“TWO DIED FOR ME.”

THE morning had broken bright and clear, and beautiful, after a wild night of fierce howling wind, and driving rain. The wind had seemed to us like a hurricane sweeping by, relentlessly uprooting trees, hurling down chimney-pots, breaking or bending everything that opposed its mad career; and our hearts had ached, as above the noise of the raging storm, had come to us sounds of distress over the foaming waters, and we had known too surely that some vessel or vessels were battling with

the waves, and that men, and perhaps women and little children, were facing the dread realities of eternity; and that, alone in the darkness, terror-stricken and despairing, many a one might be finding a watery grave.

When morning came I stood on the seashore; the storm had ceased, and now the sun shone brightly, the sea sparkled and gleamed as though studded with gems, the birds sang sweetly in the cornfields near at hand, and the storm and its accompaniments might have seemed only a hideous nightmare but for the scene on the shore. There, there were traces enough of wreck and ruin.

Sadly I gazed, and wondered as to how many had been saved from present death, and how many had been saved from eternal death, of those on board the wrecked

vessels. As I thought this, I was conscious that a sailor had come up close to me. I turned and asked him somewhat of the events of the night. He told me of the brave attempts at rescue, of their partial success; and then, as sorrowfully I spoke of the lost, he said to me very earnestly:

“Beg pardon, Ma’am, you’ll forgive a plain, blunt question. Are you saved or lost yourself? I mean,” he added, “do you know Jesus?”

Very sweet the question was, for I could assure the questioner that His Saviour was my Saviour too. And as we spoke a little of the One dear to both our hearts, and shook hands heartily, I asked him how long he had known this blessed Saviour, and what had brought him to Him.

“It is nigh on to five years since He saved my body from a watery grave, and

my soul from the lake of fire,” he said. “Never will I forget it, for *two* died for me.”

“Two?” I questioned, in astonishment.

“Ay, Ma’am, two,” he answered. “My Saviour died for me 1800 years ago on Calvary’s cross, and my mate died for me just five years since, and that brought me to know my Saviour.”

Seeing I was interested, he continued :

“It was just such a night as last night that our vessel was driven on to a rock just off the coast of ——.”

“We hoisted signals of distress and fired guns, and by-and-by brave men on shore manned the lifeboat and put out. We hardly thought it could live in such a sea, but they tried it, and God helped them to succeed. With difficulty we got our women and children in, and she put back to shore.

Once more, manned with another crew, she put out, and this time the passengers were got on board. Then we knew some of us must die, for if the lifeboat could put out again, she would not hold all that were left, and the vessel must sink ere a fourth journey could be accomplished. So we drew lots who should stay. My lot was to stay in the sinking ship. What a horror of darkness came over me! ‘Doomed to die and be damned,’ I muttered to myself, and all the sins of my life came before me. Still I was no coward. I made no outward sign, but oh, Ma’am, between my soul and God it was awful!

“I had a mate who loved the Lord. Often he had spoken to me of my soul’s welfare, and I had laughed, and told him I meant to enjoy life. Now, though he stood by my side, I could not even ask him to pray

for me, though even then there was a moment's wonder that he did not speak to me of the Saviour. I understood it afterwards. His face, when I once caught a glimpse of it, was calm and peaceful, and lighted up with a strange light. I thought bitterly, It is well for him to smile ; his lot is to go in the lifeboat, to be saved. Dear old Jim, how could I ever have so mistaken you ! Well, Ma'am the lifeboat neared us again ; one by one the men whose lot was to go got in. It was Jim's turn, but instead of going he pushed me forward. 'Go you in the lifeboat in my place, Tom,' he said, 'and *meet me in heaven*, man. You mustn't die and be damned : it is all right for me.' I would not have let him do it, but I was carried forward. The next one, eager to come, pressed me on. Jim knew it would be like that, so he had never told me what

he was going to do. A few seconds, and I was in the lifeboat. We had barely cleared the ship when she went down, and Jim, dear old Jim, with her. I know he went to Jesus ; but, Ma'am, *he died for me!*—he died for me! Did I not tell you true, *two died for me?* ”

For a moment he paused, his eyes filled with tears. He did not attempt to disguise them. They were a tribute to the love that had gone into death for him. Presently, when I could speak, I just said, “ Well ? ”

“ Well, Ma'am,” he said, “ as I saw that ship go down I said to God in my heart, ‘ If I get safe to land, Jim shall not have died in vain. Please God, I *will meet* him in heaven. Jim’s God must be worth knowing, when Jim died for me that I might get another chance of knowing Him.’ ”

“Was it long,” I asked, “before you found the Saviour?”

“It was not long, though it seemed so to me then. I did not know where to begin. The thing always before me was Jim going down in that sinking ship, with the quiet smile of peace I had seen on his face; waking or sleeping it was before me. At first I thought more of Jim than of the Lord, and when the men wanted me to go back to my old ways and to the drink, I said outright to them, ‘I could not do it, mates. Jim died that I might get another chance of going to heaven. I know I cannot get there that way, and I vowed poor old Jim should not die for nothing.’ So when the men saw I meant it, they left off asking me, and so I got left to myself. Then I thought I would get a Bible, because I had seen Jim reading it, and he loved it so, and before I

began to read it, I just said a bit of a prayer. I was very ignorant, and I told the Lord so, and that I did not know the way to get to heaven and meet Jim, and I asked Him to show me the way.”

“And He did?”

“Ay, ay, Ma’am, that He did. I did not know where to begin to read in the Bible, so I thought I would just begin the New Testament and read straight on till I found out how I was to be saved. But oh! I had an awful time of it at first. When I came to the fifth and sixth and seventh chapters, every line seemed to condemn me, and I said to myself—‘It is no use, Tom: there is no chance for you. You have been too bad,’ and I shut up the book. Then Jim’s last words came over me again, ‘Meet me in heaven, man.’ So I thought Jim must have thought there was a chance for me,

and He knew about God and his Bible, and about my life, too. So I opened it again, and read on, and on, and on. I was always at it whenever I could get a few minutes.

At last I came to the part about the two thieves, and the Lord saving the one, and I thought, Here is a man almost as bad as I am. So I dropped my Bible and fell down on my knees, and said, 'Lord, I am as bad as that thief; will you save me just like you did him?' My Bible had dropped down open, and as I unclosed my eyes, after praying this, they fell on these words: 'Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.' I took them as my answer. I did not think I was going to die. I almost wished I was, but I thought Jesus had sent me these words to tell me He had forgiven me. So I went down on my knees again and thanked Him. Of course

I was very ignorant, but bit by bit I saw just the way of salvation : at first I had only come to the Saviour, and I never doubted He had saved me before I saw the way.

You will wonder, perhaps, how I could be so ignorant, but I had had no pious parents. I was an orphan, and went to sea very young, and never read my Bible, so I thought people got to heaven by turning over a new leaf and being good, and saying long prayers, and some day I meant to begin to be good. Then Jim died for me, and that set me thinking in earnest. Well, Ma'am, it was not long after this day I have been telling you about, that I discovered all about the way—how Jesus had died instead of me, and taken away all my sins by His precious blood, and how His blood was on me instead of my sins, and that was how I

could be brought to God now, and taken to heaven by-and-bye, for 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin,' and it is only sin that keeps us away from God. At first, Ma'am, it was Jim's watery grave that stood between me and my old sins, and since then, Ma'am, it is another death—it is the blessed Lord's own death that comes between, for He died for those very sins; and so I feel as if I did not belong to myself at all. My earthly life has been bought by blood, and my eternal life has been bought for me by blood, and next to seeing the Lord Himself, I do long to see Jim shine up there."

And now let me ask you, my reader, the same question my sailor-friend asked me—"Are you saved or lost yourself? I mean, do you know Jesus?" And if before God you can say, "I am saved by the blood of

Jesus, and safe for all eternity,” then let me leave with you the verse that my morning’s conversation left with me :

“Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”



MARGERY D—.



MARGERY D—.

SHE was spoken of as “a good woman.” Her neighbours called her “very religious.” Among her fellow workwomen she was looked up to and respected. It is true the giddy and trifling shunned her as “*not their sort,*” but still they respected her, while the steady quiet woman felt honoured by her regard, and by her company.

I cannot say any of them loved her. Had you asked them why, you would have heard various answers. “She is too religious,” or “she is proud,” or “she does not think

we are good enough for her," the young and careless would have told you in a moment, with many more such reasons.

The thoughtful women would have been puzzled to give you a satisfactory reply, for they appreciated her worth. "I think a mighty deal of Margery, but I could not just say I love her," was about as near to the truth as you could arrive at.

The fact was Margery was *self-righteous*. Trusted by her employers, and looked up to by her companions, she felt perfectly satisfied with herself.

She had her own thoughts as to the actions of every one else; and her own standard, by which she judged these actions, and pretty severely did she condemn all who did not come up to her standard. Thus she did not win love. She put herself outside others as a judge, and everyone else felt

almost like a prisoner at the bar, who, however much he may fear and respect his judge, can scarcely be said to *love* him, not even though he should dismiss him with words of strong approval instead of blame.

Margery read her Bible three times a day always, and she said her prayers, and she lived an outwardly correct and upright life ; and she thought in her heart that she thus stood as high in God's favour as she did in the favour of her employers.

She spoke of "going to heaven" as though it were as much her right to go there, as to go to her own little room at night, the only home she knew on earth.

But Margery's title to heaven was not the blood of Jesus, but her own model life ; the example of honesty, industry, and sobriety she had set to others, her careful church-going, her Bible reading, and the

saying of her prayers. I speak of this latter as “saying of her prayers,” for of her it was not then recorded in heaven, “Behold she *prayeth*,” and between the two there is a great difference.

Do not think for a moment, dear reader, I wish to make light of Bible reading, or an upright life, or outward respect to God. Far from it. These are good and right as far as they go, but they will not redeem a soul from death, nor give to God a ransom for it; one ransom only will God accept, and that is the one He Himself has provided, the blood of Jesus Christ, His own beloved Son.

To think of meriting heaven by any good deeds of my own is to deny the total ruin of man, to deny that “In me that is in my flesh dwells *no* good thing,” and therefore to deny the necessity for the atonement.

If my living a so-called “good life” can save me, the Lord Jesus Christ need never have died to save me.

But the thought of being utterly *lost and ruined and helpless* in herself, and of being saved entirely by the work of *another*, and that other God’s own blessed Son, never entered Margery’s mind.

Had you asked her the old evangelist’s great question, “Would God do a *righteous* thing if he cast you into hell?” she would have answered emphatically, “No.”

Thus, you see, she had never seen herself in the light of God’s presence, and discovered there the difference between the holy and the unclean. A soul that comes to God finds out two things, first, that he is totally unfit for God, and then that God has Himself provided a way, by which he may approach unto Him.

God cannot let man into His presence in his sins, nor in his own robes, the robes of self-righteousness and works, for in the light and dazzling glory of that presence these are shown up as “filthy rags.” But God provides a robe suitable for the place, and man has only to let his own filthy garment fall off, and take the one of God’s providing in its place, “the best robe,” even Christ.

But Margery was wrapped tightly round with her own garments. In the dark (as to God’s thoughts) they looked spotless, but the moment came when the Lord brought her into the light, and she saw herself as she was, “*unclean*.” She was accustomed to *speak* of death placidly as “God’s angel to carry her to the realms above,” and piously she would fold her hands on hearing of the death of a neighbour or acquaintance,

and “trust they were prepared for the great change ;” implying that of her own preparation there could not be a doubt.

But then Margery had never faced death. Thirty years she had lived, strong in nerve and robust in body generally. Death to her looked like an angel who might be sent to any one else, but from whom she herself by no means *expected* a visit, and if the truth be told she as little desired as expected it.

In one moment the Lord put her face to face with death and eternity, and then she found she had nothing on which to rest her soul's salvation. She saw herself then as she was, a sinner in her sins.

A sudden and unlooked-for accident among some machinery racked her poor body with pain, and her soul with terror.

The surgeons considered it necessary at once to amputate both leg and arm, as the

only chance of life, and they did not hesitate to tell her this chance was small, and the issue more than doubtful.

No words could tell her agony. The mental torture far exceeding even the sufferings of the body, great though these were.

Her friends whispered, "Thank God, Margery, *you* are prepared for the worst. Thank God you are not afraid to die, whatever comes you are quite resigned, you have led a good life, and have long been ready to go."

Poor Margery! She only felt "I am a hypocrite as well as a sinner. I have missed everything, for I have missed *the one* thing."

Then, I suppose, her first real prayer went up, "Lord give me time to find Thee. Lord be merciful to *me a sinner*. I thought myself all right, but I have missed the one

thing needful. Lord be merciful to me a hypocrite as well as a sinner.”

This was while lying on the table where the surgeon's knife was to do its work.

A Christian doctor standing by, whispered in her ear, just before the chloroform was administered, “Do you know Jesus?”

“No, I do not,” said poor Margery in reply, “but I want Him. Do you think He will give me time enough to find Him, even yet before I die? I have been a hypocrite, I missed the way of salvation. Will He give me time?”

“Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out,” was the whispered answer; and then the chloroform was given.

This was Margery's real conversion, though she had no peace yet, for now she judged herself, she took sides with God

against herself, condemned herself, and turned round to Christ.

Days passed on, and Margery still lived, crippled in body; humble, penitent, and still distressed in soul. Thus I found her.

I went to the hospital ward in which she now lay, by mistake; I had been sent to that ward to find some one else, and addressed Margery under the wrong notion that she was the woman I sought.

On discovering my error, something in her weary, anxious look made me sit down by her side, and in a few moments I discovered her distress of soul and its cause.

There was no need in this case to seek to rouse her to a sense of sin, she was already crushed under its weight. “I am a hypocrite,” she said, “and oh, Ma’am, the Bible says, ‘the hypocrite’s hope shall perish.’”

“Granted, Margery, that you were a hypocrite, but you have given up trying to make yourself appear fair now, either in God’s eyes or man’s, and you want the blood of Christ to be your shelter. do you not?”

“I do, I do, indeed.”

“Do you believe His blood has power to cleanse *all* sin?”

“I do.”

“Even the sin of hypocrisy?”

A long pause ; then, with streaming eyes and anxious look, “God says, ‘*all* sin!’ and that must take in hypocrisy—*all* sin—oh, does it really take in mine, my long years of living a lie?”

“Margery, do you believe that God knows everything?”

“Yes.”

“And sees everything beforehand?”

“ Yes, I am sure He does.”

“ Then when God wrote that ‘ the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin,’ do you think He forgot yours ? or did not know of yours when he said ‘ *all sin* ’ ?”

“ He must have known. Oh, He must have meant *mine* too. Jesus—*Saviour*.”

I left her then, for I saw she had another to talk to, for He had spoken to her, and she had heard His voice, and of human voices she seemed unable to bear more at that time.

As I left she murmured, “ Will you come back ? God sent you to-day.”

Her old friends could not understand it, she told them simply that her religion had all been mere empty form, that though they had thought her the best, she had really been the worst ; for she had been a hyp-

crite, and religion like hers would not do to meet death with. She told them of her agony of soul on that operation table ; of her terror and dismay, and fear of death and judgment ; of the long, dark days of distress that followed, as she thought her sin too great for forgiveness, and then how the Lord had spoken peace through His own little word “ *all.*”

The women listened amazed. “ If Margery was not fit to die.” they said, “ what is to become of us ?” The Spirit of God made this question rankle in some of their bosoms, “ What is to become of us ?” till they followed Margery’s example and ceased their questionings at the feet of Jesus.”

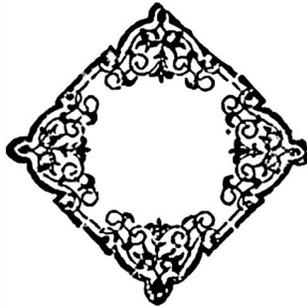
Margery lived a year after this, and then one dark winter’s morning the Lord whispered to His tired, suffering child, “ *Come*

home,” and she smiled back an answer of deep satisfaction, “Take me, my Saviour.” There was no terror now, no distress, no darkness, no desire to stay another hour; no need of preparation. She left herself in His arms, and He gently put her to sleep.

But though she only lived one short year after she knew the Lord, many blessed God for that one year of Margery’s life. I could tell you of several happy Christians, who in their turn are circles of blessing, and others, who if you asked them how they were saved, would tell you of some simple word of Margery’s as that which had first roused them to anxiety about their souls, or had directed them to Him whom she so loved to call, “My Saviour.”

Reader, is He your Saviour yet? If not, take care lest, though you may say, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let

my last end be like his ;” your end be like Balaam’s of old, slain among God’s enemies, in the day when He shall make His foes His footstool, for “Behold *now* is the accepted time, behold *now* is the day of salvation.”



“ONCE IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.”



“ ONCE IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.”

“ WILL you try and say a few words to a new little patient of mine, before you leave the ward this afternoon ? ”

It was the head nurse, in one of the large wards of a city hospital, who spoke, and her manner was peculiarly grave and thoughtful, so much so, that I asked at once, “ Is there anything special in the case, Nurse ? ”

“ It is as sad a one as I have seen since I have been in this hospital, and that is many years now,” she said ; and the tears stood in her eyes.

It was a rare thing to see Nurse K. so moved. She was a bright cheery woman, universally liked and respected by the patients, to whose wants and comforts she attended with unwearied patience. Every one of them seemed to cling to her as to a tower of strength. The ward was a different place if Nurse K. were out for a holiday. She knew me well, and often gave me hints as to the actual state of the sufferers, which helped me greatly in seeking to say a few words to them of Jesus the Saviour.

“What is wrong with your new patient, Nurse?” I asked.

“Consumption, Ma’am. She will not last more than forty-eight hours, if she does that ; but, poor child, what is so sad is she is only seventeen, and she is a wife, and has been a mother. She lost her little baby some months since, and from that

time has just pined away, so they tell me. Her husband brought her in last night. He would not part with her till now it is too late ; the doctors can do nothing for her. If they had only brought her in sooner !” the kind woman added, “ and she is such a pretty young thing to die—and the worst of it is, I am sure she is not prepared to die. May be she would listen to you if you would speak a few words to her. She is in the bed at the right hand corner, the other end of the ward.”

Nurse K.’s words thrilled me with deepest interest. I did not wonder that the tears stood in the kindly-hearted woman’s eyes. Only seventeen, a wife, and a mother, beautiful, dying fast, and *Christless*, or “ not prepared to die,” as she expressed it. My own heart was full, as I walked down the ward to the bed indicated.

When I reached it, my interest deepened in the young sufferer. She looked almost a child, and so lovely. Never had I seen so fair a face. She was propped up in bed, nearly in a sitting posture, and was gasping for breath. Large drops stood on her white brow, and trickled slowly down her face. A bright colour was on her cheek, which looked almost transparent ; a still brighter light in her eye ; but it was very evident that grim monster, Death, had laid his cold, iron hand remorselessly on this young and beautiful and beloved one, and was hurrying away with his prey.

I have hardly ever felt as awe-stricken. It seemed as if no words, almost no prayer, would come. She looked, as Nurse K. said, too fair to die ; and yet we both knew surely she was dying fast, and dying without Christ. Eternity just a hand's

breadth in front of her, and she not ready to meet God !

She looked up as I came close to the bed, and smiled sadly. It was a bright day in early summer, and I had in my hand some lovely roses and ferns. She looked longingly at the flowers, and I said, “ Would you like to have some of them ? ”

“ Oh, so much,” she answered, they are so beautiful.”

She spoke with difficulty, but showed great interest as I placed the flowers on her bed, and began to arrange the finest of them in a little vase to stand by her side.

“ It is so kind of you. I am so fond of flowers,” she said.

“ So am I,” I answered, “ they are some of God’s own handiwork; the God who seeks us to be His children, that He may show us a Father’s heart ; the God who

gave His own Son Jesus our Lord to die for us, to save us. Do you know Jesus?” I whispered.

Never shall I forget how that young face changed. Her brow darkened, and a look of thorough hatred gleamed from her eyes. Only once before in all my life had I ever seen a look like that, in a woman's face. It was not weariness or indifference, it was hatred to the very name of Jesus.

In a moment I was silenced, the shock was so great of seeing a dying girl turn so decidedly from the fountain of life. Then, I thought—I hoped—perhaps it was only a look of pain, and stooping down, I repeated in a low voice, “‘God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Would

you not like to possess this everlasting life?" I asked her.

Again that terrible look of deliberate rejection. "I do not want to hear of these things," she said. "I am too weak."

"I know you are very weak, too weak to talk;" I answered, "but you will let me read to you a verse or two of God's own word. I will not tire you."

"I do not want to hear," she said, "it is too late now. Once I might have listened, and believed. Now it is too late. I am dying, and I do not want to hear," and she closed her eyes as much as to say, "You may as well leave me, my decision is final."

Horror stricken, I stood as though rooted to the spot. She was so young, so interesting; it seemed too awful to think she was just about to lose this life, and the next too.

I could not leave her thus; and when I could speak, I said, “It is never too late to trust Jesus. He says, ‘Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.’ He would not cast you out; He would receive you, and take you to Himself. Come and try Him.”

Once more her brow darkened. “You are kind,” she said, “but I do not want to hear; it is too late. I know I am dying. Once it might have been. Not now.”

Nurse K., who had followed me down to the bed, and heard all that passed, looked greatly distressed, and said, “Listen to the words of Jesus, dear. You know you are very ill; turn your thoughts to God.”

“I do not want to hear,” was the only answer, and she turned her head from us to the wall. The nurse and I looked sorrow-

fully at each other. I had no resource but to leave, but before I did, I repeated three verses of Scripture, in as clear a tone as I could command.

“The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

“He that believeth on the Son hath life; he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

“Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

There was no response—no movement even of a muscle of the face, and sadly I turned away. “She has been like that ever since she came in,” Nurse K. said. “I tried to read a hymn to her, but she would not listen. She said always, ‘Once it might have been, but now it is too late.’”

Never did I leave a hospital ward so sick at heart. Never had I seen

exemplified quite so plainly our enmity by nature to God. Here was one dying, and knowing it, with nothing left on earth, and yet unwilling to have Jesus and His glory.

That fair young face, with its expression of hatred to the Son of God, haunted me. I could not rest for it, and longed to see her again, hoping some ray of light might have entered her soul. But no! twenty-four hours after she had told me so decidedly she did not want to hear of Jesus, she was in eternity.

“How did she die?” I asked Nurse K.

“As you saw her,” she said; “she seemed to have no fear of death, but to the last she refused to listen to the Bible, or anything sacred. I never saw the like since I have been a nurse.”

“Once it might have been, once I might

have listened and believed. Now it is too late.” The words ring in my ears yet, though months have rolled by since they were uttered by those dying lips.

Once, before then, she had heard of Jesus ; once she had been inclined to listen ; once she had been near salvation—near it, but missed it, and missed it for ever.

Has this been your case, my reader ? Have you once listened, and almost believed ! Have you once been near salvation, but missed it hitherto ? If so, may the Lord make this poor girl’s case a warning voice from the dead to you, lest the devil tempt you to put off decision for Christ till another day, and lead you, as he did her, on and on towards eternity, blindfolded, and even on the very brink of that awful eternity lull you still, so that no warning cry of danger reach you or rouse you

—lest God leave you alone, and you wake up and find yourself shut out from Him for ever and for ever.

“My Spirit shall not always strive.”



THE FATAL CHOICE.

THE FATAL CHOICE.

THE last rays of a summer's sun were lingering still over the busy town of —, when one, who knew the Lord in that place, received an urgent message to attend the bedside of a dying woman.

“She is dying, and afraid to die,” were words that admitted of no delay to any heart who knew the priceless value of one precious soul; who knew, too, that it possessed a secret which could change the fear of death into a song of triumph, even the knowledge of Jesus, who by His death and resurrection has robbed death of its sting, the grave of its victory, and made its dreary portals only the gateway into joy unspeakable for each soul who knows Him.

With a longing heart to speak of Jesus to a needy sinner, His servant's footsteps turned hastily, yet prayerfully, towards the part of the town indicated, taking the messenger, a young woman, as guide.

After winding through many a narrow street, the guide stopped before a dingy dwelling, one of a long row of similar-looking ones, and said: "You will find Mrs. —— in the right-hand room of the third story. You can knock, and go right in, for she will be expecting you."

The house was one let out in single rooms, and crowded with inmates—a house where poverty, and wretchedness, and sin, and haggard forms, and faces with deep lines of care in them, abounded—a house into which you longed to bring Christ for comfort now, as well as for eternal salvation. Your heart ached at the sights and sounds around you,

as you murmured in His ear, “And for such, for such, Thou didst die!”

In the room pointed out—the right-hand room of the third story—a young woman was lying on a poor low bed, apparently dying, apparently also in great concern as to her soul, and as to the hereafter about which she had only very dim, misty ideas, to enter which seemed to her like “taking a leap in the dark,” and this leap she feared to take.

On entering the dying woman’s room, the deplorableness of it struck you. There were but few things in it, and these of the poorest description. Two little children were playing on the floor with the lid of an old box, and a tiny baby, a sickly, weakly-looking infant, was lying on the bed by the side of its mother, uttering those piteous wailing sounds that move the very heart of the listener, however hardened, when it

seems as though the poor little suffering one had not health or strength enough even to cry, only power to suffer.

In the mother, however, even deeper interest was centred; for the message, though brief, had conveyed this clearly enough, that she was dying without Christ. Sitting by her bedside, the visitor, whom she welcomed eagerly, read to her from God's own Word how Jesus came, and bled, and died, to save just such as she. She listened, she asked for prayer, and earnest prayer went up for her that she might learn to trust Jesus.

Jesus and His love, however, seemed to have no power over her heart. She was afraid to die—terribly afraid to die. She wanted to be assured she would not go to hell, that was all. About this she was anxious. One or two neighbours were in the room, her husband being away at his

work, and these gathered round the bed to listen, as once more God's offer of salvation that moment, through Christ and His finished work, was presented to her. His willingness to save, His desire to have her, were pressed upon her. She was moved, almost she was persuaded.

Again she was besought not to put off accepting Jesus and His offered mercy, but to give Him the joy and herself the blessing of letting Him save her that night; but beyond the "almost persuaded" she did not get. She wept, she seemed in earnest, she did everything but accept Christ; and, promising to return the following morning, her friend at last left her, asking the Lord on the homeward way to show what it was that hindered that soul, apparently anxious, apparently so near eternity, from closing with the offer of the Saviour.

Again the next morning and the next

evening was God's Word read to her, with the same results,—almost persuaded, never quite decided. Jesus was a Saviour to her, but not her Saviour. Sometimes the deciding point came so near, there seemed but a hair's-breadth between her and eternal life. Still she lingered on the shores of death, and deep anxiety and sorrow filled the heart of the one visiting her, which sorrow was only to be deepened.

Days passed on, and she hovered between death and life, naturally and spiritually. Her interest in the Word of God, her desire for prayer, continued unabated; yet it seemed as though she would put off till the last moment her decision for Christ. Her anxiety for safety seemed great, and the City of Refuge was just before her; still she loitered on the road, within reach of safety, but not safe.

Presently there came a change. She

rallied, as to her bodily health; and as her strength increased, her interest in the things of the Lord decreased.

A day or two more, and hopes were entertained of her recovery, and then the evening visits—once so eagerly looked for—were evidently no longer welcome; for she was up in the evening for a short time, and neighbours came in.

With the thought of a prolonged earthly life, desire to possess eternal life seemed to disappear. It was only for death she wanted Christ. She was afraid to die without Him; but if she were to live, she would rather live without Him. She had only been half-persuaded to become a Christian.

Oh, how the devil laughs at “almost persuaded” souls! He likes to see them almost persuaded, it kills their consciences, they rest there so often, and never take the half-step farther, that lands them at the feet

of Jesus. "Almost persuaded" suits his purposes exactly. They have not got Christ, and he does not care what else they get.

Satan knows well their folly, though they do not; for he has tasted heaven once himself—he knows its blessedness, its joys—he knows, too, what it is to lose it, to be an outcast from God, though he never knew our supreme joy, who believe, of being there, because Jesus Himself so loved us, that He died to have us by His side for ever.

About a fortnight after the first visit to Mrs. —, there seemed every prospect of her speedy recovery; and then, though grateful to the one who visited her for kindness shown to her, it was quite apparent there was no longer real concern about the soul. The subject once so welcomed by her was now irksome.

One bright summer's morning, unwilling to give her up, longing with intense desire for her soul, and yet with a deep feeling of solemnity, her friend entered her room. She was up that morning, for the first time so early, and full of the joy of recovering health again, but with no note of praise to the Lord.

Several neighbours were in the room, young women like herself, and there was evidently some object of great interest being discussed. It soon came out what the subject was. A fair was to be held, at a short distance, in a week's time, and Mrs. — was full of the thought of going, her friends persuading her she would be quite well enough by then.

Greatly distressed, her visitor listened, and then solemnly, earnestly, put this question to her :

“ Would you give up Christ for a fair ? ”

“But I am getting well now. I am not dying now,” she answered; “and I do mean to be a Christian some day.”

It was the world had shut out Christ. You would not have thought her world was much, could you have seen that poor, dark room, those little half-clothed children, the poverty and wretchedness of everything. But it was a big enough world, even that, to close her heart against the Saviour, to shut Him out. And you, who wonder at her, weigh for one moment your world in the scales of eternity, and say, are you making a wiser choice? Are you taking anything, everything this world can give, instead of Jesus, and life eternal in Him? Then your choice is like hers—a fatal one.

She chose to give up Christ for “the fair next week,” and Satan cheated her even of the poor paltry joy he promised her.

Solemnly, as though on the very verge of

eternity, with this as her last opportunity, was she warned not to risk her eternal salvation for so poor a thing—for this had plainly been the whole reason of her indecision. She had hoped to get well, and go to the fair, and so she wanted to wait, and put off being a Christian.

It was no new wife of Satan's; he has tried the same with thousands, saying, "Be a Christian, of course, some day, but not to-day—do this first."

With a sad heart her friend was leaving, but turned back to leave these two scriptures with her: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation," and "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." For a moment once more she wavered; but a neighbour's laugh prevailed. Her decision was fixed.

"I will think of these things, another time, but not to-day."

Turning to the women standing round, her friend said: "God grant you may never have to feel you helped a soul on to everlasting ruin!"

A laugh rang out as the door closed: it sounded like the mocking laugh of Satan.

It was about eleven in the morning when this visit was paid. Between three and four o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, the visitor was returning home, still thinking of Mrs. ——, feeling even no power to pray for her, and yet quite unable to think of almost anything else, when a voice said, suddenly, "Have you seen Mrs. —— to-day?"

It was the doctor who had been attending her who spoke, and his manner was very grave.

"Yes, doctor," was the answer. "I suppose she is getting quite well again now."

“She is dying!” was his reply.

“Dying! Oh, surely that is not possible, she seemed so well this morning.”

The doctor was a man of few words. His only explanation was: “Inflammation, acute. She may not last an hour.”

And he was hurrying on, but turned back to say: “Probably she will not be conscious; but if you can be of any good to her, you had better go at once.”

It needed no second bidding. Hurriedly, tremblingly, that well-known door was reached, “the right-hand door of the third story.” On entering, what a sight met the eye! Mrs. — was lying on the same bed on which she had so often listened to the Word of God, but how changed now! Her eyes looked painfully strained, her hands were tearing at her chest as though she would tear something out, and the only words she uttered were: “On fire already.

‘God is not mocked.’ *Too late! too late!*”
It was an awful scene! The same young women who were there in the morning stood by now as though paralysed.

Her friend knelt to pray that even now, at the eleventh hour, she might look to Jesus, and be saved. The words of prayer were interrupted by a half-struggle, half-shriek, so unearthly as to be appalling. Her face was the picture of despair, and agony, and wild affright. And with the terrible words, “*Too late! too late!*” once more on her lips, and one last awful struggle, she passed away.

The silence of death fell on that little company. The women cowered together, awe-stricken and trembling, and for a time no one even went forward to close the eyes of the dead. That last “*Too late*” from those dying lips had seemed like a voice from another world.

Only a few short hours before, those lips, now cold and motionless on earth for ever, had said she “would think of these things *another* day, *not* to-day,” and he, who “had the power of death, that is, the devil,” had taken care that, for her, that other day should never come.

It was a moment of never-to-be-forgotten solemnity. For a time the silence was unbroken even by a movement; and then in the presence of the dead—terrible witness of the danger, the awful folly, of delay—once more Jesus and His *present* salvation were pressed on those who had witnessed that dying scene, and that *this* moment, this only, belonged to them.

She, like they, had intended to be a Christian *some* day, and never meant to *die* unsaved, only to live a little longer without Christ. She had even seemed to start on her road to Him.

The women were deeply impressed; and as once more words of prayer went up for them, deep sobs came from many. I believe that death-bed bore fruit of life, which the coming day will make manifest.

Dear reader, if you are unconverted still—that is, if you do not know what it is to belong to Jesus—may this sad story live in your memory as each sorrowful detail lives in mine, and give you no rest till your choice for eternity be made. And may that choice be like the choice of one of old, of whom the Lord could say, she “hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her”! For what was *that* choice? To be close to Jesus for time, listening to Him, worshipping Him, and by His side for all eternity!

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