BV
4905
.R6

Does God Comfort?

Class BV4905
Book .R6
Copyright No.

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

DOES GOD COMFORT?

BY

ONE WHO HAS GREATLY
NEEDED TO KNOW

NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

BV4905
.T76

LIBRARY of CONGRESS
Two Copies Received
MAY 18 1906
Copyright Entry
May 18, 1906
CLASS a XXc. No.
146173
COPY B.

Copyright, 1906,
By THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY.

Published, April, 1906.

Dedication

TO ALL WHO DEEPLY NEED TO KNOW
THAT GOD CAN COMFORT

He that escheweth Sorrow and hateth to dwell with her, is as one who rejecteth an angel and thereby wrongeth his own soul.

He that thinketh his own cross heavier than another's and far too grievous for the bearing, knoweth not that to each God allotteth the one cross that most truly testeth his weakness and so urgeth him Godward for helping.

He that feareth the ministrations of Death and deemeth him an enemy, wotteth not that behind an austere seeming hideth a most gracious angel, the warder bearing the keys of the door to the life immortal.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

The Supreme Question 1

CHAPTER II

Counter Currents 5

CHAPTER III

Poor or Rich 13

CHAPTER IV

The Test Infallible 18

CHAPTER V

A Call and a Response 23

CHAPTER VI

Seeking the Life Eternal 31

CHAPTER VII

The Transfiguration of Grief 41

CHAPTER VIII

Forbid them Not 51

CHAPTER IX

Sunset Hours 73

DOES GOD COMFORT?

CHAPTER I

THE SUPREME QUESTION

Even in the days when men in general believed in a personal God, — there came a time to every soul that sounded the heights and depths of human experience, when one question seemed more imperative than any other, — Can God comfort? From the depths of bereavement, from broken hopes, often from wholly blasted lives, the cry went up insistently, — Can God comfort?

Even in those days, in proportion as agonizing distress laid its unescapable grip on a soul, that soul had inevitably to readjust its faith, to know what it actually believed, to question God, as it were, and to learn, if possible, the meaning of life and death, and prove for itself the reality of things unseen, the permanence of all true ties, the nature of the treasures that cannot fade.

Even in those days, souls often felt that their burdens were intolerable. The graves that covered their beloved seemed to hold all that had made life worth living; the hopes that had fallen to dust in their hands seemed to have taken with them all the sunshine and sweetness of earth; while to lives blasted and seared

by sin, what remained but the darkness of despair? And these conditions of questioning seemed inevitable even while men still believed God in his world.

To-day, natural law, cold, impersonal, eternal — as men measure — seems to many to stand where once stood God the Father; and the primary question to many a man is, Can it be proved that there is a personal God?

We grant that men have a right to ask this question. They cannot, in the readjustments of science, escape the asking; yet neither can they by any amount of merely scientific investigation find a way to answer their own query. Science reveals but God's methods, not Himself; and yet to every soul to-day comes the insistent question, changed in form, indeed, but more terrible even than the old instinctive appeal to God. Can God comfort? is infinitely simpler than, Is life worth living, presupposing that man is but the noblest animal and that death ends all?

If bereavements, if sorrow, if despair, were bitter in the days of an inherited faith, what must they be to-day to the myriads bending beneath them, in a world that to them holds no eternal Fatherhood, knows no Christly fellowship, and points forward to no personal immortality?

If we grant, and we must, that men have the right to follow whithersoever all truth leads them, have we any ground for believing that, thus following, any soul shall truly find God, — the Source of all law, of all life, of all strength and comfort, — and each in his own personal experience prove that life is worth living, that death does not end all, that it is rather but a nobler

beginning, a putting off of the dust of earth, a putting on of the garments of immortality, in a life that transcends the highest imaginings of to-day? In short, may men *know* that there is a God who cares for the souls that He has made, who is able to comfort in our bitterest bereavement, to perfect every true hope, and to lift again into wholeness and holiness those who have sinned most deeply?

More than this: if there is such a God, one who can help, one who cares to help, has not each soul the right to expect help in its search for Him, to be assured that, honestly seeking, it shall find Him, and that having found Him, in Him it shall find all fulness of comfort, of strength, and of peace?

One soul at least believes that God responds to every honest prayer more truly than did ever any earthly father's heart respond to the cry of his children; that in exact proportion to each soul's need is its Heavenly Father's loving pity, and that it may become impossible for a logical brain to doubt the existence of a God who fully understands every need of the individual soul, who can satisfy the very highest desires of that soul, who can lead it to Himself by paths that soul itself will approve as its years pass and its life grows, who can lift it into fellowship with Himself, removing from it, day by day, all that defiles it and hinders that fellowship, not by easy methods but by sure ones; and who, if need is, may even allow a soul still in the body to know that death does not end all, that the dead do not forget, and that all the souls in God's keeping — part on earth and part in heaven — are not widely sundered by death's invisible barriers.

If to one questioning soul has been given power to believe that all this is true, to attain absolute rest in the very heart of life's vicissitudes, and to know that God *can* comfort, — will it seem a needless service if that soul tells, as simply and as truly as it can, what made it a questioning soul, why it sought God, and how it found Him, and what the seeking and the finding won for it as its years went by?

CHAPTER II

COUNTER CURRENTS

To have any value at all, this little monograph must be personal as well as truthful, and with candor describe the progress of one soul toward self-knowledge and toward God. It is probable that there are some fortunate, or unfortunate, individuals who find little difficulty in self-analysis, and to whom the results of that analysis are quite satisfactory. To them, this is a very good world, and the position they occupy in it well suited to them and most comfortable.

But there are others who for a long time find it impossible to understand themselves mentally and spiritually, and to whom their circumstances and surroundings give much discomfort, until, so to speak, their individuality becomes so regnant that they can rise above the limitations and sorrows of their external lives, or to put it more strongly, till the soul can forget, or at least master, the bonds of the body.

If, instead of studying one's self too closely, one now and then studied one's ancestors, especially the immediate ones, the problem might sometimes be greatly simplified.

For one, I confess that I had never at all understood

certain perplexing traits of my own, till a little monograph on "Our Scandinavian Forefathers" fell into my hands. Then I understood that I belonged to a Race as well as to a Family.

In the meantime the years had been bringing me questions that the fact of race could not answer. Why were some of the convolutions of my brain always questioning the conclusions of others? Why could I not believe as easily as the majority about me seemed to do? Why was there an inevitable interrogation suggested by every positive statement that I heard? And why did I demand in others qualities that justified reverence as well as love? Where or when did I get the assurance that nothing worthy ever ended or could possibly be lost, and that, after all, to serve was better than to be loved?

Of course these questions came clearly only as the years brought me full self-consciousness. Once insistent, however, I sought, as I now think logically, for practical answers to them; and I had not to go far afield before finding such answers.

I had often noted the difference between my parents. My father was a grave, strong, upright, silent man, educated, and — in the highest sense — self-sufficing. Tall and muscular in form, with a noble head, deep-set, clear eyes of darkest hazel, from which always looked forth a questioning soul, a firm mouth, a square chin, smiles that were infrequent but that lingered long in the memory of those to whom they were given, — the man as a whole, in his maturer years, gave an unusual impression of reserved power and depth of feeling. In manner he bore himself with a rare, old-time cour-

tesy toward all, and whatever may have been his freedom of speech in his sea-going days, was never known in the later years to utter an impure or profane word or to tolerate a speech of *double entendre;* and whether he had faith or lacked it, whether he approved or disapproved the methods by which this world was controlled, he kept to himself.

Thoroughly conversant with the affairs of the world at large, his affections were centred in his own home circle; yet even there he was undemonstrative. He spoke little of his past, and it was only as one noted his intense interest in his own country and in the political fortunes of his adopted land, that one caught glimpses of his natural intensity of nature. Quiet as always were these manifestations of strong feeling, it goes without saying that he was a man without intimacies. He did not care for them. Whatever life had to give him, it had given; and satisfied or not, he was master of his fate, at least to the point of silence, save to his wife. She knew him through and through.

My mother, — what words shall I find to describe her? She was sunshine, sweetness, sympathy incarnate. I have never known another possessing her magnetic sweetness. The tenderness in her voice, the charm of her smile, the irresistible mother love in her deep, dark eyes, were patent even to the merest stranger, and drew to her at once the saddest as well as the sunniest-hearted, eclipsing even, to a great degree, the admiration awakened by her loveliness of face and manner, and the freshness and zest with which she met and mastered all the duties and cares of her daily life. She had beautiful hair, a low, broad forehead, a strong,

yet delicate face, a mouth that seemed made for smiling, and eyes and hands that drew and held every one, from the little child in its own mother's arms to the most critical, the most cultivated, or the most needy man or woman who met her.

No one could resist her personal charm, a charm so spontaneous that those who felt it dwelt lightly on her grace or sweetness, and new acquaintances often asserted, "She is the only person I have ever met exactly like my own mother." Those who knew her understood that this impression came not from her resemblance to any one else, but because she was so truly the embodiment of ideal motherhood.

Deeper and subtler even than her unusual power to attract was her power to inspire and to comfort. The most discouraged and the most sinful felt renewed hope in her presence, while those whose hearts were breaking under bereavement found new power to believe in love that does not die and in continued fellowship.

She had suffered greatly in various ways. She had come to believe in God unreservedly. Her faith was as natural and as simple as a child's, and she spoke of it as simply as she might have done of some rare elixir that had been given her and that had brought her strength and peace. It follows, that she never met a soul that did not respond to hers, that she was loved and trusted beyond any other woman that I have ever known, and that, all unconsciously to herself, "acting the law she lived by without fear," she won an influence and left a memory that became a living power to those who had known her. Faithful in every relation in life, to every duty, and to every soul

to whom she was led, she was an absolutely unforgettable woman.

These imperfect sketches of my father and mother are as exact as, after many years' experience with many lives, and a completed knowledge of their entire lives, their earlier and their later days, I can make them.

It will easily be seen that, in early life, they had developed positive, but contrasting, characters, — the one, to outward appearance, cold, analytic, questioning, and to a certain extent self-indulgent; the other, tender, spiritual, believing, and absolutely self-forgetful: and from them united in me two distinct individualities.

Born in Scotland in the later years of the eighteenth century, two very unlike early environments had tended to form these contrasting characters.

My father was an only child, of wealthy parentage, to whom nothing was denied, and whose future seemed to promise all that love and wealth and fine natural gifts could secure to him. His mother died in his early manhood, just before he had completed the study of his profession, and, quite broken down by grief, his physician ordered a sea voyage for him.

England was then at war with France. The vessel on which he sailed, while still in sight of land, was visited by a press gang, and every man on board, save the captain and the officers needed to get the vessel back into port, was impressed into the British navy.

For a year a common sailor, associating with men many of whom he loathed, and exposed to miseries of which he could never speak calmly, only his Scotch conscience saved him from suicide. Then some

accident revealed the fact that he was an educated man and a fine letter-writer, and he was removed from the forecastle to a stateroom, to serve as private secretary to his captain. He proved so valuable that seven years passed before he was allowed to go ashore in any port where he could have claimed release as an impressed British subject. I do not know that he heard from home in all those years, although a few of his letters reached his friends.

Reaching home at length, he found that his father had been remarried, to a woman below his own station, that the young lady to whom he had been engaged had been forced into an unwelcome and undesirable marriage, and that his guardian had embezzled the fortune that had been left to him by his mother.

Thus homeless in reality, penniless, and with all his early hopes broken, he faced a world that had given him ashes for bread, darkness for sunshine; and he went to meet the future, a man very different in hope and in prospects from the one he might have been but for these inexplicable experiences.

Some years later he met my mother, and she brought to him renewed hope and joy, and at least acquiescence in a life that he could never fully understand.

My mother's life, on the contrary, began in a very humble home, filled with children and abounding in the most unselfish love and happiness. Not what might be done for the benefit of one member of the family, but what each might do for every other was the law of that simple home. An inherited faith, that of the "true Covenanters," had come down through generations, and still had such power over them that they, too,

like some of their ancestors in whose memory they gloried, would, if need were, have bravely suffered the loss of all things for it. God in Jesus Christ and eternal life seemed as real to each member of that family as their own existence.

Their father, a veritable priest of the Most High in his own household, and a man rich also in all natural endowments, left his indelible stamp upon each of his children; and later they went out into the world able to endure as seeing the invisible, because they had seen a visible servant of the Most High, able also to get all possible gladness out of the best things of earth. Poor as they were in worldly wealth, even to-day the influence of that home suggests to me, who never saw it, only happiness, sunshine, the noblest thinking and highest living.

Thus from two homes separated by utterly unlike conditions this man and this woman came together to create a new home of their own. Changes came with the passing years. For a time comparative wealth surrounded them. Then a financial reverse that swept over America, where they were now living, touched them heavily, through no fault of theirs. A little later, in a New England home, in very plain surroundings, my own life began.

I have dwelt thus fully on my antecedents, to explain a nature that, as time went on, found itself anxious to believe in God, yet disposed to question everything, but held to its search after God, by the influence of the strongest and holiest personality I was ever to meet in the flesh.

From my father came the critical, reticent, mate-

rialistic temperament, that questioned everything, human and divine, until it seemed to be proved. From my mother came my instinctive search for God, and my somewhat peculiar way of estimating earthly values which I shall soon indicate. Humanly speaking, all that I have learned of God's power to guide and to comfort came to me because my mother so truly made him real to me. Teaching me unconsciously, by her way of loving, the height and depth of human love, she made it imperative that I should seek to know the God who had made her what she was. One begins with one's mother. Blessed the soul that goes on with its mother to her God and its God.

CHAPTER III

POOR OR RICH

Poor, I suppose the majority would say, though I came into my little world at a time when everybody was poor, compared by present standards. I do not remember that there was any special contrast between the furnishings in my own home and those in the homes of any of my playmates. We had some handsome pieces of furniture that had remained after the break in the family fortunes before referred to, and with the happy faculty I always possessed of enjoying to the utmost whatever about me was enjoyable, I remember these pieces only; all the later ones have faded from my memory. Still, as I do not recall any carpets save homemade ones, and few books and pictures, and as we never had a servant (though for that matter only one family in that New England town did have that blessing or that bane), we must have been poor; but I still believe, as I did then, that in all the world the sun shone on, there was no other child quite so happy, quite so indescribably well provided for, as I.

The first thought that I can clearly remember was the exquisitely comfortable one that my mother was

the very best mother in all the world, and that the sun always shone where she was. A little odd it seems to me now, that the very first thought that I recall should have proved, as it did, the germ thought of all my later comparisons of good and ill fortune. I did not know why I thought it then. I did not even know who the I was that was thinking it; I only thought it and hugged the thought to my baby heart, — for I was less than four, — and felt an exceeding warmth and gladness. Still, I know now that we were poor. Facts that I learned in later years proved to me that in those very days my mother was bearing burdens that would have daunted any soul less strong in faith in God and in unselfish devotion to her family. But for me, always, until I was ten, there was nothing that I could ask or think of, that I did not possess, or something that I thought was even better, in its place.

One item, very small to me then, indeed quite unnoticed, doubtless had much to do with my physical comfort, — my mother was a notable housekeeper, notable even in those days, when not to be a good housekeeper was discreditable; and I remember with special delight the times when I was promoted, as I grew in years, to little posts of helpfulness, — as I thought, — hinderings as they must often have been. Our home shone with cleanliness from the cellar to the attic. It was always clean and consequently there were no distressing days of house-cleaning; while the table, not by any means an expensive one, was never forgotten by any who shared the hospitality of our home; and there were no "ups and downs" to that table; my mother never prepared for company, she

simply shared with any chance guest what had been prepared for her own family.

It was this power of welcoming others, in proportion to their needs, to a whole-hearted sharing in the very best that she herself possessed that made my mother's home a veritable haven of comfort and delight to all who crossed its threshold. "The gift without the giver" was never offered in her welcoming hand. To her, there were neither rich nor poor, cultured nor uncultured, saint nor sinner; they were all souls, the children of the Heavenly Father, whether they knew it or not, — and each one came to her as one of a family comes home, sometimes after long wandering, prodigals who knew that, hating sin with intensest hatred, she pitied the sinner in proportion to his need. She did the welcoming; but my father, different as was his temperament, never said her nay. A little oddly, with all her generosity, she was most economical; nothing ever went to waste.

In all the intervening years, and it is now long since she went to her rest, whenever I have met any one who had known my mother, I have had renewed evidence of the strength of the bonds that bound other souls to hers, and drew them irresistibly Godward, drew them Godward, not by words about God or by any seeming effort, but by an unusual influence that seemed to come from something above herself. No one could define it, but each felt it.

Even in my earliest childhood, I instinctively realized that it was not in external ways that my mother differed so much from other people, as in ways that I could not then understand. Later, I have realized that

she was as far above me then, if I may be understood in saying it, as God now is. *She was as God* to me then.

Of course I loved my father and my brothers. Of course a thousand little things brought me happiness every hour. I did not know it, but I had a passionate love for everything that was beautiful. I was alive in every nerve and sense of my body; and as I have said before, I realize now that if there ever was a happier child in all the world, it must have been because that other child had a larger nature, — as mine was filled with perfect happiness to its utmost limit; and in and through and all about me was that ever swelling ocean, wave upon wave, of love for my mother.

Thus had my mother laid unconsciously a foundation of love, human, indeed, but in proportion as it was perfect, bound sometime to make the soul, once absolutely satisfied in it, turn to God, seeking Him at first blindly, but most honestly, and finding — ah, well! I can describe to a certain extent what my mother was and is to me, and I can tell a little of what I have found in God, what I have begun to find; but what I have found is as a drop in an ocean's wealth, all I *need* to-day, an inexhaustible supply. As to-morrow's needs come, and as eternity's to-morrows come, one by one, may I not believe that the supply, inexhaustible to-day, will deepen and expand in proportion to whatever need I shall find as I press ever onward, in the larger life toward God?

Once at rest in God, once sure that one has found the Life that cannot die, the Truth that cannot fail, the Way that must forever lead onward and upward, one

loses all fear of loss; one looks through dauntless eyes at all that existence can bring.

May I not believe that to my soul the time shall surely come, even while still bound in the flesh, when death and distance and silence shall be no actual barrier to a love and communion satisfying the soul as it was never satisfied in the days of sweetest and strongest earthly fellowship?

CHAPTER IV

THE TEST INFALLIBLE

It is not my purpose to describe in detail the various steps by which I was led to believe that to know God was the supreme good. The varied experiences that moulded my life as my years went by were only such as are common in the average home, to the average child, — with a difference, the power of one soul that knew God, and loved Him in proportion to that knowledge, over the soul of her child striving to understand her and to be worthy of her love.

I have sufficiently indicated the heredity that might have made me question everything that I could not, at least to my own satisfaction, demonstrate, and which, even under the most favorable conditions of assured faith, has made me care little for shibboleths and look upon all creeds, even when most helpful, as human, and bound to be enlarged as the race grows near to God.

Perhaps I have cared less for these things than I might have, if by some reason that I cannot yet explain I had not from the very first — that is, as soon as I knew anything about Jesus Christ — taken into my heart His own test of discipleship, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to

another." I do not of course know when I first heard it nor when I began to apply it, but I lived under the light of it. I mean, I saw it daily reflected in the life that I loved best on earth, and whatever else was real or was not real in the world about me, before I was ten, I knew that my mother owed her power of loving and serving to the Christ whose disciple she was.

I had a more or less thoughtful brain, and very early studied as carefully as I could the evidences regarding the actual life of Christ on earth, and always, as I grew older, noted more and more carefully how people met or failed to meet His test of discipleship.

By degrees my eyes — I mean my mental eyes — centred their gaze more and more strongly upon my mother's life. I used to think to myself, "If Jesus Christ has had power to make one life perfect, why not many, why not all?" She had never any thought that her wide-awake, fun-loving daughter was looking every day into her face for the reflection of Jesus Christ's, but it was so.

I have before indicated that I was an unusually happy child. Indeed, I think the impression that I produced, ordinarily, till I was long past my teens, was of irrepressible gayety; and it required my strongest efforts to keep myself moderately staid, even after I became a professing Christian and felt that I ought to walk most circumspectly. I make this statement simply to show that no ordinary observer would have suspected for a moment that such a very lively girl ever thought of looking into any person's face for an expression of the love that proved its kinship to Jesus Christ.

I had my friends, but my mother was the only person who really knew the depth of my thinking as well as the strength of my loving. Always, as the days and months and years passed by, my love for her grew with my growth and deepened with my own development, and as I look back upon those years, those beautiful, blessed years, — beautiful and blessed despite the lack of many things, — I see now, even more clearly than I felt then, that her life in Christ was the quickening power in my love for her and therefore in all that made life most worth living to me. I know now that, from my very babyhood, everything that she did for others, every appeal that was made to her, lifted her in my eyes and drew me after her.

At first I was not conscious of it, but now I know that always I looked at others through questioning eyes, and that from the beginning, hungry as I have been for human love, I have cared less that people should love me, than that they should be worthy of my love. I could not help it, I was born so, born so, perhaps, because I was her child and also my father's.

Yes, we were poor; but as I look back at the wealth of that home, I feel again, as I felt through all the years, even when the pressure was hardest, that there was not in the whole world, and never had been, a home that could have been so much to this especial me as that was. I cannot recall one unkind word. Rather strangely, I cannot recall a fear for the future. Still more strangely, I do not recall that my mother ever censured me but twice. Ordinarily she looked right over the imperfections and lacks in my daily deeds, at the little girl she was expecting me yet to be, at the

noble Christian woman that according to her faith I was yet to become.

In the meantime her one thought, her one aim — and one understood it without any conscious effort on her part — was to help everybody to the extent of her ability, and for herself, to know more and more of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

And so I came into my early girlhood, morally certain that the noblest character I knew in the world owed its power of loving to the fact that she was a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Hence He whom I had never seen became hardly less real to me than she who stood beside me in the flesh. Unconsciously, the test had worked night and day before me from my first thoughtful moment, and the love of God had been made real to me ; and thus I had taken my first step toward finding absolutely satisfying love, love that was immortal, as well as satisfying. Behind my mother's face I had caught a glimpse, faint, perhaps, but real, of the face of Jesus Christ. I had learned what He could be to her in the ordinary ways of life, — on the common heights and depths, in the dark days and in the bright days ; and what He could make her able to be to others, — out of her poverty making many rich. And now I was to learn my first real lesson in God's power to comfort.

As I grew older, care deepened about our home and into it came the sorest sorrow of my mother's life, the death, under distressing circumstances, of her eldest son, a young man of unusual promise, whom she loved and leaned upon with a love and trust that his character fully justified.

Year by year I had seen her comforting and strengthening others all about her who were in sorrow and distress, always able to minister to them. Now I was to see her, in a sorrow I have never seen equalled, turn to God in agony that no human hand could soothe. I had never seen such suffering before; and, strange to say, for I have seen many other sufferers since those long-vanished days, I have never since seen it surpassed. It seemed as if every possible element of distress came to her in that death. She made no rebellious outcry; she was very silent, but night and day when alone, she walked the floor in her agony, and, if she thought herself entirely alone, subdued groans attested her breaking heart.

Suddenly one night, in the very depths, God spoke peace to her soul, and she came from her chamber in the morning, calm, gentle, and with the sunrise of the eternal morning in her eyes. And from thenceforth, for more than twenty years, she walked steadfastly forward in the light of that peace.

To me, wondering with intensest fear as to what would be the effect of all this anguish upon my mother, and why, if she had told the truth to others about God's power to comfort, He did not comfort her, this change in her, this coming back to peace again, taught the first conscious lesson of God's actual power to comfort; and I had taken my second step, though I knew not that I had taken any, toward finding God.

CHAPTER V

A CALL AND A RESPONSE

To the prophet of old standing in his exile on the mountain, and watching for the manifestation of God, neither the whirlwind, the earthquake, nor the fire revealed Him, — only the "still small voice." Doubtless many a soul has been forced to think of God and to seek after Him if haply he might find Him, by the disastrous effects of whirlwinds of passions, of earthquakes of tottering hopes, and of fires that have burned and blasted the strength and joy of his life, forcing him, as it were, to seek God for strength to live, lest, not finding Him, he should curse Him and die.

To me came neither the whirlwind, the earthquake nor the fire, in the most momentous evening that I was to know.

Strange to say, always an attendant at church, always living in the holy light reflected from the saintliest of lives, and believing in God as truly as one can whose faith is not founded on one's own experience, I had never had any consciousness of sin, and was nearly sixteen before I ever seriously considered my personal relation to God.

I have more than once intimated that my love for

my mother would have absolutely satisfied me, had there been no other deep springs of happiness given me, but for some reason, and quite independently of conditions, my life was a peculiarly joyous one. I was passionately fond of books, capable of the most intense delight in everything that was beautiful in nature and in art. I had a large circle of friends, and I was conscious of no lack, save that I was wise enough to realize, as I grew older, that nothing earthly is permanent. Young as I was, I could foresee the days when the mourners would go about the streets and desire should fail. I knew that my mother must die, and I had always intended to become a Christian when she died, and not till then. In the meantime I was having, and expecting to have, all the happiness possible to a temperament like my own. But a day came that marked a sudden and permanent change in my life's plan, and — if conversion means the turning of a life — my conversion.

I remember that Sunday. It was a cool evening in October. A revival was in progress a few miles distant, and several of my friends had that day joined the church. One who had witnessed the exercises was describing them to me, and I stood listening to the account.

As I have said, it was cool, and at the beginning of the talk I laid my clasped hands on the drum of our heater. When I laid my hands there, I had not a thought of personal interest in the subject. As I stood listening, the thought came to me strongly and clearly, like the echo of the "still small voice," — and I have known for many a year that God was truly in that voice, — "If you are ever going to become a Christian,

why not now?" and before I lifted my hands from that heater I had responded to that call from the depths of my soul, "God helping me, I will."

I said nothing to my caller of the new motive in my life, but as soon as he had departed, went to my room, took my Bible, read the third chapter of St. John, knelt down and prayed thus, "O God, my mother's God, teach me to know Thee and to know myself." I do not remember another original word, but providentially, as I later came to think, the Lord's Prayer came into my heart, and I repeated it sentence by sentence, trying as well as I could to understand it, and to mean what I said in repeating it.

I cannot tell why, but that prayer seized my soul, and I do not think I have ever since knelt in prayer without making it part of my petitions. And I have been astonished to find the heights and depths to which and through which that prayer carries the soul that clings to it.

In the whole exercise, I had not a particle of emotion. Some impulse that I did not understand had taken hold of me, had come into my life, and if there was a God, a living God, not the remote and indefinite Being I had called God up to that moment, I was willing to be led by any steps that would bring me to Him, that would make Him real to me, and make me true to Him, and true to myself. I did not in the slightest degree realize it, but entirely without spiritual life I had unconsciously placed myself in direct connection with the strongest spiritual force in the universe — with God; and I was to prove that, as the electric current finds the hand that touches the wire, God would

inevitably find me if I continued to touch Him by the sincere desire to find Him.

Ready to be found, and ready also to take any step and every succeeding step that should lead me Godward, I rose from my knees, conscious only of inexpressible ignorance about God, and leaving my room, entered again the family circle. My mother was absent, ministering to a sick neighbor, and in the hour or two that intervened before her return, I had taken my first practical steps in "walking alone" Godward.

I have so often smiled at my first real effort at being "good," and yet it was a very genuine effort. A temporary member of the family had a most unpleasant manner and affected every one disagreeably. It was fairly easy to be courteous to him, but to do things whole-heartedly for him had been more than I could always accomplish. That evening, the moment I appeared, he made a querulous demand for something, in his most unpleasant tones, and I entirely surprised myself, whatever the effect on him, by meeting the demand with ready cordiality; and I am glad to say that I was able to retain that manner in my subsequent relations with him, even if it was often much harder for me than then.

I am aware that this was in itself a very insignificant matter. It was important solely for the fact that it was the first time in my life when I had tried to do anything for Christ's sake. I had often done things for my mother's sake, and never without deep gladness that I could do anything to serve her, but never before had I looked beyond her for a higher motive than human love; and it was, as it proved, the very first

step, the feeble step of a little child, in the effort to find the path of Christly service in which she was to tread for many years, never doing any great things, but many a small one, and more and more whole-heartedly as she "followed the gleam" that led her more and more steadfastly after the breathings of the "still small voice."

In a little while my mother returned, and as soon as we were alone I told her all about my new decision, — that I meant to seek God with my whole heart, and that I meant to do everything that I possibly could to aid me in finding God.

I told her frankly that I did not feel that I was a sinner, and that I was afraid that it was going to be very hard for me to obtain any real faith in God.

"My one motive, mother," I said, "is to become so much like you that we can never be separated even when you die; and perhaps God won't have me on those terms."

My mother looked at me, turned the light of those beautiful, dark eyes down deep into my soul, and said: "Dear, God knows how to lead human souls to Himself, even by feeble, human hands; and if you do really want to find Him, for any motive, and will follow Him one step at a time, He will lead you until you do find Him, and care a thousand fold more for Him than for any gift that He has given you. And He will teach you to know yourself also, and when you know yourself truly, you will know how unlike you are to God; and then you will find your consciousness of sin. One step at a time, dear, and simply holding on moment

by moment to your desire to find God, and you will surely find Him."

Then she knelt down and prayed for me and I prayed again. She asked God to give me just what I needed to lead me to Himself, and I said, "Lord, I will take just what Thou givest me and do the best I can." And my mother and I had had our first hour of prayer together. The last was to be on the night when heaven seemed already opened to her, and I knelt beside her, holding her dying hands, and thanking God with all my soul that those hands had led me to Him, that I had truly found Him, found a love even more real than my mother's, a love that had glorified my life, even in its darkest hours, and made all sorrow and care and pain but ministering angels on my homeward way, and death and distance no real barriers even in human loving.

My mother was still to stand by my side in my efforts to find and to serve God, for more than fifteen years. Then she was to go forward into His immediate presence, and I to follow, alone, but not alone, ever with the sense of perfected companionship those only know who learn, by evidence they may not doubt, that the dead do not forget, that the communion of saints does not end, that the highest fellowship may exist in ever growing sweetness between two souls, one gone forward into the perfect life, the other quietly following after, till it, too, shall attain.

I did not know all this, then; I was studying the first letter in the alphabet of Christian experience. I had felt only the first throb of spiritual life, yet did not even know that my heart was beating with a new pulse;

but it was, and I had taken my first conscious step Godward.

Here, then, I stood, a young girl, almost a child in years, yet with an intense personality, and capable of making almost any kind of a woman, — a strong, unselfish, and faithful one, if led steadily upward by a "Power without myself working for righteousness"; or a passionate, exacting, headstrong woman, who, finding her idols dust and embittered by earthly loss, might have learned to scoff at human truth, and laugh at the notion of a God proving his existence in whispers, and wreaking the misery of chastisement on souls whom He wanted to conquer.

One soul had truly interpreted God to me, and, despite the fact that I as yet knew Him not, had made me long to share the indefinable power that He had given to her; and that longing alone, without any consciousness of need on my part or any premonition of the dangers one side of my temperament would inevitably lead me into unless I was led by the Spirit of God, had made me turn an attentive ear to that "still small voice" whispering, "Why not seek Him now?"

As I look back to those long ago days, as I recall all the existing conditions then surrounding me, and stand again in memory on that forever vanished point of time in which my soul responded to that suggesting voice, it seems true to me beyond question that that moment was the decisive one in my soul's life. I knew it not, but all my previous life had been leading me up toward that moment, and from that moment one of two motives was to control me. I was to go on seeking to know and to serve the Highest, and to prove all

that that knowing and that finding could lead me to: imperishable gain, immortal fellowship, friendships that cannot die, and service that blesses in proportion as it costs, and, however imperfect, links the humblest soul with its divine Master.

These lay waiting in the coming years, if I listened and followed the voice. Or, refusing to hearken to the voice that was not a voice, only the breathing of a spirit to a spirit, I was to go on drifting, satisfied as long as I could be with the things that perish with the using, and laying up my treasure for the moths of time and the rusts of years to consume; and, carrying all the strength and passion and tenderness, latent still in the soul so soon to be a woman's soul, to meet alone — as every soul must meet alone — the burdens, the temptations, the bereavements that are the inevitable lot of every life that has to face a long vista of mortal years.

To-day, more than for any other hour that I have known, I thank my God for that hour and its solemn decision. I see again, and I believe that I shall forever see in memory, that plain old sitting-room, with its air of sunset peace, and the joyous girl listening to the idle talk that was to enshrine forever within its memory the whisper of the "still small voice," "Why not begin to seek God now?" And I see her turn to the seeking and begin the life of a woman in earnest.

CHAPTER VI

SEEKING THE LIFE ETERNAL

It was such a different world, the next morning, and yet it was the same old world. The Disagreeable Man was still very much in evidence, and so were hosts of other little things that were hardly more agreeable than he; and the irrepressible temperament of the girl was the same, and all that was beautiful and delightful in the world was throbbing with life as joyously as on previous days; yet, in reality, nothing was the same. Into what seemed to have been a vacuum before, or at least an unrecognized part of her being, had entered a new and dominating motive, and below every other thought lived this: "I am pledged to learn all that I can about God, and to do whatever I believe to be His will, and to accept whatever He gives to me."

The conditions outlined were comprehensive beyond my faintest imagination, but how great was the ignorance with which I faced the upward way in which I had elected to walk. How little I knew how to take one step wisely, with perhaps one exception. I was wise enough to know that if I was going to be a genuine Christian, I must at once avow myself one, or at least a seeker after God.

I was so gay in temperament that no one could be serious in my presence, and the one effect that I had produced on my friends, up to that time, had been of unceasing vivacity and liveliest badinage.

I could not meet my friends on the old thoughtless footing, with any safety for myself or straightforwardness toward them. Nothing could have led me into cant of any form, nor in those sunny years broken my love of fun or my delight in the joys of earth. But in all the past I had been frank toward every one, and I now went straight into the merriest group of my associates, and said to them, *à propos* of a revival just beginning in our own town, "I have made up my mind to become a Christian, and I am going to be as thorough a one as I know how to be."

If I surprised them, and I had the fullest reason to believe that I did, they surprised me no less in turn, for it seemed to me that instinctively each of them did for me just what I had done for them, turned on me the light of one side of their natures hitherto unsuspected, the side that was spiritual and thoughtful. Thus, at the very beginning of my Christian life, a frank avowal of my new attitude, brought to me the first fruits of the deepening joy in friendship, given to those that share together the best that the days bring to each.

Henceforth I stood in a true light among my friends. I was my old self, with a difference, and they were their old selves, with a difference. They understood me and loved me all the more, and spoke to me as freely as I to them of the new truths that were becoming *real* to me, and affecting them also. And so I learned

the value of taking a stand, of being frank and true with one's friends, particularly in vital matters.

I proved also, though I did not then appreciate its full blessedness, the inestimable value, at that particular crisis, of the perfect confidence that had always existed between my mother and myself. If it had not been the most natural thing in the world to tell her freely of my new motive in life, and almost as natural to speak freely of it to the friends I loved, it seems to me now very probable that after a while the impression might have faded and my resolution to seek God have been abandoned. As it was, I was committed to my new quest, and I fared steadily forward in it.

I have not the slightest desire to make this book autobiographical. It is the story of far too common a life to justify, for a moment, such a thought; but just because it is the story of a common life, the true story of a common life that was led by a power outside of itself to begin and to continue a quest for God and to find in God all that was truly sought, — power to believe, power to cleanse, power to sustain through all sorts of sorrows, power to comfort in the heaviest bereavements, power to "see through a glass," and not always "darkly," after the vanishing ones, — it may help to show to other common lives the simplicity and certainty with which they, too, can find all that that unpremeditated decision led to my finding.

Notice, please, that I say "all that was truly sought." I did not find all that I should have sought. But I realize, to-day, that had I asked for higher things as the days went on, much of the burden and sorrow of the later years would not have troubled me. At rest

in God, I might have escaped the stress of the conflict; but I accepted too much as a matter of course the burden and heat of the day as it came; and I had to struggle with many a temptation that could have had no power over me had I trusted less to my own strength and wisdom and been able to ask on all lines, simply for the "daily bread" of to-day, and not for some of that of to-morrow also.

But when I began to go forward in my quest none of the experiences of the coming years lay outlined to my vision, and I went to meet them one step at a time.

I smile gratefully when I remember how practical was my beginning and my continuance in my quest. I lived in a town where church lines were very sharp, for it was before the ending of the old religious exclusiveness, and creeds were paramount and shibboleths strongly insisted upon. But I had heard the tones of Jesus Christ's voice calling me through my mother's, and neither differences in creeds, in shibboleths, nor in church lines troubled me. I went my own way after my Master, as did those who sought Him in the early days.

I had been a great lover of general reading, but for three years now I studied the Bible almost exclusively, without commentaries or on denominational lines, and I tried to live as simply and truly as I would have, had I been among those who followed the Master when as yet forms did not exist.

I do not mean to say that I was not a strict attendant upon church services. I was. I did not neglect a single opportunity of associating with Christians in

religious worship, and I sought every possible way of serving others. I believed that Christ meant what He said when He proclaimed the Golden Rule, and I strove to live up to it. I took many things literally that perhaps, by my excessive devotion to them, were not helpful.

But my wise mother kept her hand on my spiritual pulse, and somehow, always as I reached the danger line, some suggestive word from her, supplemented by the whisper of the "still small voice," lifted me over the danger into broader pathways, and a more just conception of my real duties.

For a while I was extremely anxious to *know* that I was a Christian, and to have warmer feelings toward God, and I often wondered why I could not see truth more clearly; but I soon came to realize that I was too finite, too imperfect, to have any right to expect to understand any truth save as I lived by it, and that in proportion as I did this, it would become clear to me.

Two passages of Scripture seemed almost like personal messages: the one, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for all that shall believe on me through their words." That seemed to say to me that Christ Himself had once prayed for me personally. The other, "If any man will do the will of My Father, he shall know of the doctrine." From this I deduced the truth that to do the will of the Father in proportion as I knew it, would lead me to all the truth I needed to know.

And I went steadfastly, if haltingly, forward, trying to do the will of the Father as I saw it; and day by day, unconsciously receiving the answer to at least a part

of my first prayer, learning by the failures of my every-day life at least to know myself more and more truly, and thus preparing to know God, the Father, the Leader, the Helper of souls.

And so the days and years went on, the sincerity of my search for God and my genuine desire to accept all truth wheresoever I found it and whithersoever it might lead me, inevitably broadening and perfecting my life as a whole.

The great souls of the past, who had followed God and served their fellows, illumined and broadened my spiritual horizon. They spoke to me their individual messages, and whatever was of truth in them found me freed from whatever had hampered it in its first utterance, while the rest glided harmlessly by. Always, under all that I heard and read, was the consciousness of the personal Christ, emphasized to me by the most catholic human being I had known.

And so, David, John, Paul, Calvin, Wesley, Faber, Robertson, Martineau, and many another unlike his brethren in all save his quest for truth, ministered to me of the best he had gathered, and thus I was being educated by contact with the noblest minds I had found outside the New Testament as well as within.

And why should I care for the barriers of creeds, when Toplady and Charles Wesley — at swords' points theologically — each from his own side of the shield could write, the one, "Rock of Ages," and the other, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"? I loved their hymns, but I forgot the limitations that bound each to his own side of the shield, and so hindered his seeing the truth his brother saw.

In those days, too, I was unconsciously being made ready to meet the great storm of Biblical criticism and theological unrest already preparing to burst upon the world. The Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, Our Lord's two new commandments, and the simple story of His life and teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and the story of the life as given by John, the twenty-third Psalm, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah (whoever wrote it), the eighth of Romans, the thirteenth and fifteenth of First Corinthians, and the twelfth of Hebrews, contained for me truth enough to meet every human need; and I confess that it did not matter much to me what they meant to Biblical critics, nor whether Genesis was as allegorical as Revelation, or not. I knew that I had needs that nothing I could find elsewhere in any degree satisfied.

I knew, too, that in proportion as I abode in Christ and His words abode in me I should attain the highest level of which my life was capable on the earth. I knew, beyond the possibility of a cavil, what He had done for others; and nothing could shake my faith that it was a fact that one being clad in mortality had lived and died and risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and could do for me to-day, even for me, what He had done for others whom I had known.

I saw, too, clearly as it seemed to me, that if Jesus Christ was only a simple Jew, only a man like other men, he was the spiritual miracle of the ages, who, uneducated and with no accessory of material power, yet transcended the highest thought of the grandest brains ever active among men, a man whose stature the uplifting power of nineteen centuries has not yet

paralleled and never will, the Master of the world's spiritual force, the one man who knew God, the Father, and man, the Brother.

I was not troubled by the missing link between the animal and man, for I believed Jesus Christ to be the missing link between man and God, and that to me seemed the paramount need. I could think it very probable that man was decidedly akin to his lower brethren; nor did it trouble me when the days of creation suddenly expanded from one hundred and forty-four hours to endless æons. Indeed, to my unscientific mind it seemed, if I may reverently say so, that the God who could wait in patience through millions of years for the development of His thought manward revealed His own infinity thereby, far more than He would have by the creation of the world in a brief time. It did not surprise me at all that theologians had made many a mistake in "thinking God's thoughts after Him," any more than it seemed strange to me that perfectly sincere Jews felt that they had had the right to expect an imperial Messiah, and not a crucified King.

And so, spiritually, I went on my upward way, holding myself constantly committed by word and deed to my search for truth, and now and then beginning to see gleams of the light that never was on sea or land, — if I may so say, light from the world invisible, beginning to understand a little of the practice of the presence of God; and yet making many mistakes, striving very hard to do what a little child in the Kingdom of God might have done very easily, had it forgotten itself and trusted its Father wholly.

Then, too, I learned that out of one's very mistakes

and weaknesses, if they be left with God in real humility, God can lift one as on healing crosses nearer to Himself; and so, as I grew humbler by testing my own weakness, I grew stronger.

I do not care to refer to the material experiences in my life save to say that they had become both exacting and exhausting, so much so, that but for my practical faith, my natural buoyancy of temperament would have been sorely strained. I could never have given up and felt that life was not worth living, let what might have happened, for my mother was still with me; and then, as now, it had never seemed possible that any amount of care or trouble could have made me wish that I had never been born, for I could never doubt that my life had been one of God's good gifts to her, as hers had been the best, next Jesus Christ, to me.

One day I understood, as in a flash of light, all the way in which I had thus far been led. I was passing through a particularly severe experience, and my soul sent up a dumb appeal to God, "Why are things as they are? What possible good can come from these perplexing conditions? Why do so many of my prayers seem to fall into the void and pass unanswered? Why do I never attain the ideal life I see so clearly?"

Then into the silence in my soul came a clear memory of my first real prayer, and I realized that, to the extent of my ability and willingness to receive it, God was answering that prayer. I certainly had learned to know myself as far as I had then come, and God had been opening to me clearer and clearer conceptions of Himself. I was beginning to see something of His holiness, of His justness, of His patience, and of His truth.

These, I now realized, had been steadily growing clearer to me as I pondered His dealings with the world at large, while in His dealings with me personally I felt, beyond all possibility of doubting, that what would have hindered my spiritual growth He had been steadily withholding, that what I needed He had given me, often against my asking, but as a father gives to the child he loves; and I bowed my head in clear recognition and full acceptance of His will. Very weak, and conscious of my weakness, conscious of my utter need, I then entered into rest and strength unknown before, and I was ready, at last, to face and meet and to be lifted up by anything my Father could send me. Here, after long seeking, I had caught my first clear glimpse of the life eternal they share who come to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. I was ready for sorrow in its fulness and whatever of loss could come to me on the earth, and much was awaiting me in the oncoming years. Yet God was always to speak to me in the "still small voice," to be peace and strength and victory to me.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF GRIEF

My years had almost doubled since the Sunday evening so decisive in its results had come and gone, but in all the changes and growth that their passing had brought to me, the bond between my mother's soul and mine had steadily strengthened. Other strong friendships had come to me, and many a joy and sorrow had been mine, and some whom I loved dearly had passed on into the life immortal, my father among them, his passing hours shared and cheered by my mother as supremely as she had shared all the other days since she had known him.

Always, from my earliest memory, the one sorrow that I had never been able to look forward to calmly had been the parting with my mother, that I knew was inevitable sometime. Gradually I had become strong enough to meet bravely all else that came; but I could never even speak calmly of my mother if she was ill; I could not bear it, and I never could even imagine what I could do without her.

The last months of the conflict between the North and the South were drawing to a close. Although an intense lover of freedom, from the beginning my mother

fully appreciated the position of the South and seemed to me to have a remarkable power of suffering with its people, although she believed that the victory of the North and the abolition of slavery were as desirable as inevitable.

We had never ceased the practice of praying together that we had begun on that far-away Sunday evening, and her prayers proved to me that on scarcely any heart, North or South, lay a heavier burden than on hers, for both sections of the country. And whenever there was a great battle, no matter which side was victorious, a real distress rested on her for all who had suffered by it.

The strain of the four years had told upon her heavily, and as the war drew toward its end I could see a strange detachment from this world, and a growing nearness to the other. Her prayers, her consciousness of the presence of God, her intensified recognition of the unchanged love and personal nearness of those who had gone on before her, were at times startling to me in their spiritual fervor and strangely uplifting power.

In my early youth she had not felt at all sure that human bonds were immortal. She had once believed that in the life beyond God would so absorb the soul that lesser loves would cease to hold one; and it came to me with a great surprise, one day, when she said to me suddenly:—

"Dear, I want to tell you something. You know we have often talked about continued memory and actual recognitions in heaven, and I have never seen these things as you have. But I have changed entirely in this respect. I believe now, as fully as you do, that

souls remember, and that they care for each other in heaven even more truly than they did upon earth. I have come to believe that there is no forgetting; and I want to say this to you, — I have even come to think it possible that God may let those who have gone beyond minister to those who are left behind. And so surely as I may, I will come to you and serve you."

She kept that promise, but of that keeping I have never spoken.

And so the closing days of her earthly life went by. Week by week the end of the war seemed hastening on, and I grew jubilant with hope. One day, late in February, she said to me, "I do not think you will be able to feel as I do in regard to something, but it is borne in upon my mind that the President is going to be assassinated; and if he is, I am very certain that I shall die."

I looked at her with astonishment. "What end could possibly be served by his assassination now?" I asked. "The war is virtually over, and he will deal with the South in justice and mercy, and I think they will understand that. I certainly cannot feel as you do in the matter. I only hope that you may live till he is assassinated." And I tried to make her see a more reasonable hope for the future of the South and the North, but I could not in the slightest degree weaken her impression.

She was not personally depressed. For herself the fact that she might die, or, as she phrased it, "soon go home," seemed to make the present and the immediate future radiant, and to soften and glorify every memory of the past.

Every day the impression of the President's approaching death deepened. There seemed little regret for him, for she had keenly felt his burdens, so soon to be lifted, and believed that heaven held more for him than earth could possibly hold, and for herself but one thing grieved her. Although the thought of the home-going filled her with constantly deepening joy, she loved me as truly as I loved her, and it was not easy to leave me behind her, even though she went to all that heaven meant to her.

I still had not even the shadow of a fear for the President. I could only rejoice that the end of the conflict was assured.

Good Friday, the fourteenth day of April, had come, and the North was glad in the dawn of peace. During the day something occurred that made it perfectly natural for me, although I had as yet no fear that we were soon to be parted, to tell my mother, more fully than I had ever told her before, all that her love and life had been to me. I showed her the very depths of my soul, and she could not help feeling both what her life had been to me and what her going would mean to me; for she believed what I said, that if I could retain her for years, even after she became a helpless invalid, I should thank God for it, as for a benediction.

"Oh, don't say that, dear! Rather ask God to let me go suddenly, if it be His will, — as soon as my work is done. We shall not be separated, no matter where we are."

That was her last Friday afternoon. I had taken the sheaf of her whole life's harvesting from my life,

and laid it in her hands; and God was soon to let her "go home suddenly."

Saturday morning we had another precious hour, in which she gave me her last backward glance over her early life, and showed me how wondrously God had answered a memorable prayer offered for her, in one of the momentous periods of her life. It seemed as if the shadow of the President's coming death had been lifted, and we were sitting in the sweetness of an hour of perfect fellowship, with all the wealth of the past and all the joy of a present that took hold of immortality resting upon us.

Then the door opened without a knock and the horrified face of a neighbor appeared, who said without preface: —

"Abraham Lincoln was murdered last night, and Secretary Seward, and I don't know how many more!"

I do not remember that my mother spoke until the newsbearer had gone. She sank into a chair as she heard the fatal tidings, looked pitifully up to me, and said: "Oh, the poor South! The poor South! It has lost its best friend." It had, and I was about to lose mine.

It is very hard for any one who felt President Lincoln's death as we and many others at the North did to recall the first few hours after we heard of it; for it was not merely a national, it was also a personal, bereavement. Very soon I was to forget almost that it was a national sorrow, and think of it only as blended with the deepest sorrow that I had ever known or perhaps was to know.

For a day or two, however, I thought of it only as a

national loss. I could not believe it possible that my mother was going to die. She had shown great recuperative power in very serious illnesses, and I felt that she must rally now, that she could not die. She could not eat indeed, but neither could I; and she was very silent, but I understood that also, I thought.

Sunday passed, and she slept, or seemed sleeping, most of the time. Monday morning she aroused; and for an hour or two we shared the most perfect communion I have ever known with any soul. It was to each of us as if we stood where words were not needed. There the peace of the Lord and absolute trust in each other so filled each soul, that neither sorrow nor fear nor trouble of any kind could disturb us. As I have recalled those hours, it has always seemed to me as if during their passing I had stood with her upon some mountain's summit where our Master stood beside us and the sweetness of His presence irradiated all the past and transfigured all that lay before us.

It was in reality the ending of her conscious life with me, but I knew it not. I only knew that heart to heart, soul to soul, we stood beside each other in a union that neither care nor death nor anything but sin could break; and I felt that I owned her as I had never owned her before, and I had no fear of any possible future.

Then she went to sleep again, and although I did not realize it, when she awoke, she had passed outside the grasp of my detaining hands.

Our physician, a most skilful one, said to me that, remembering her wondrous vitality, he still had hope that she would rally, and I held strongly to that hope

all through the night. But as the sun came up over the eastern hills, I remember a strange calmness with which the thought came home to me that she was to die, and that the last visible proof of love that I could give to her lay in helping her, by concealing my distress, to die undisturbed. And God gave me strength to stay by her in quietness and peace.

So Tuesday wore away and the shadows of her last night fell upon the earth, and her hours of dying were upon her. Suddenly, it seemed as if some strange change had come. The physical pains of death were not loosed, — they were still strong, — but the spiritual glory of the transfigured rested upon her. Those whom she had loved, who had gone forward, appeared to be comforting and cheering her, as she was struggling in the deep waters, and most of all, the Lord Himself whom she had loved with all her soul, seemed to stand visibly beside her. Tones of such rapture as none of those who stood by her had ever imagined before fell from her lips.

More than once, perhaps to assure myself that, in the glory into which she seemed already to have entered, she still remembered me, I said to her, "Mother, do you know me?" Each time, instantly, came the response, "Of course I know you, dear. Why should I not?" And then she would at once resume her words to those I could not see.

Is it strange that, as the hours passed, I entirely forgot myself, and my soul was filled with unutterable joy for my mother and for all that God was leading her into, though every moment lifted her farther and farther from me?

Finally she ceased to be able to articulate, but the beatific expression remained on her face; and at length, at noon, as the first stroke of the President's funeral bells pealed slowly forth, she raised one hand, placed it for a moment on her ear, laid it down, and was gone hence.

I had long been holding those dying hands, kneeling beside her. Not a tear, not a thought of personal pain, came to me; and I rose from her side and walked the floor in an ecstasy second only to the one she had felt as she was entering the gates of the eternal city.

I have never been able to explain my own experience. It was as if I had been lifted entirely above my own selfish self; as if I had been allowed to stand at the very gate of heaven, and see my mother enter in. All sense of personal loss vanished in the consciousness of her great gain. I had not a doubt of her continued life and of her unchanging love for me, and I had not a care for my personal future. She had gone home; she had entered into life and I was glad. God was comforting me as even she had not been able to comfort me in other days, in other losses.

At length I personally knew God the Comforter, God the Eternal, in whom the tenderest human ties find their full perfection and their unending life.

Suddenly it seemed to me that the height on which we had stood together on Monday morning was to be the symbol of the altitude from which our future fellowship was to go forward. My earthly life seemed to have broken in two while I knelt beside that bed of death. Everything of the past, save my mother, seemed to have been detached or lifted away from me, and I felt

as if I were to face an entirely new beginning of my life. It was a strange consciousness; almost as if I, too, had been through the gates of the grave, yet had been sent back to finish my uncompleted years; never again to be the same.

Intuitively I realized that something I could in no way explain had been given to me, and that although nothing could break the spell that bound the "vanished hand" or restore the "sound of a voice that was still," my mother's soul had come a thousand fold closer to mine in the hours of her dying, than even when we were welded together in the hour when I turned to seek God for her sake; and I seemed to have been uplifted infinitely nearer to God and to heaven, by her very going from me. I had been made strong with a strength, glad with a joy, and centred in a peace of which I had had no comprehension before. God became the strength of my heart, and I realized that, broken off from my own past, as it seemed, I had entered upon a phase of my quest after God that was to lead me to desire to know and to serve Him above every other desire.

I cannot describe the strange expansion of soul that seemed given to me. I could not weep. I could only rest in God, and I stood beside my mother's open grave, looking, not so much at the casket resting before me, as into the bending sky above us. I did not weep even then. It was a perfect April day, and the sweet spring sunshine was all about us; and, strange to say, my soul sang with the joyousness of the spring, and with the full assurance of the Easter awakening awaiting my beloved and me, in God's own good time.

Was it possible that this woman, turning from the grave that had taken down into its depths the very pulse of her human heart, as she turned away, could face calmly and strongly, with perfect peace, the lonely years that lay before her?

Ah, yes! It was well with her mother. It was to be well with her, for God remained, and He would give her grace to serve henceforward as for two; and so she turned her steps earthward again, and went to meet the life that could never forget the baptism of peace and immortal love that had come to her as her mother passed on through the gates, into "the city that hath foundations."

CHAPTER VIII

FORBID THEM NOT

As one looks backward and scans the great experiences of life, one cannot help noting how often it seems true that one experience must be completed and parted from, before another comes forward to take its place. But when I turned back to the daily duties and cares of life again, alone, I was not thinking of coming joys or sorrows; I was thinking simply of how I could most truly live the life that opened to me on that April day.

As I have said, I took up life again, sorely bereaved, and yet with a sense of an expanding life unknown before. New work, new duties, came to me. The new duties led to new friendships.

With my friends, some of them among the noblest and highest souls I have ever known, I was to learn duly the sweetest lessons that simple friendship has ever taught me. They were to walk worthily by my mother's side in helping me to apprehend unwritten laws of fellowship and mutual service.

After a time a new home opened its doors, and I entered in, carrying, to those who shared it with me and to those who entered only its outer circle, the tender and comforting touch of unseen hands, and the influ-

ence that had never ceased of that far-away Sunday evening that had given the permanent impulse to all the after years.

To this new home, also, were to come many joys, many sorrows, and many cares. There were kindred tastes and kindred principles and, to a large degree, kindred experiences. Unlike in minor respects, in essentials there was marked resemblance, and the ability to hold each other's strong confidence through all life's future changes. Each had a passionate love for little children, and when the day dawned that our little daughter came to the hearts that were waiting for her, there was no happier home in all the land than the one that welcomed her.

I need not try to describe her. I could not, if I would, say all that she seemed to us, indeed all that I think she really was if the words of others could be trusted. She was very fair, her eyes were blue, her hair golden, and even as a little baby all her motions were graceful and joyous. She grew apace and filled our home with the indescribable and unforgettable sunshine and joy that a gladly welcomed little child must always bring.

We had supposed, before her coming, that we knew something of the character of the happiness a little child would bring to us, but in the depth of our delight in her, we learned that we had had but the faintest conception of the ever-welling gladness that lay before us.

I will not dwell upon her developing days. Before she was two we learned that the happiness we had supposed complete could be made still deeper; for when a little son was born to us, we found that the hearts of

a father and a mother grow larger and richer as child after child is given to them.

I am not, however, to dwell on the happy days that went so swiftly by. Any one can strike a harp of joy. I am writing of the ways in which God has comforted me, and not of the days in which He has simply blessed me.

One or two friends who had noted my almost ecstatic love for my children had told me that I must not love them so intensely, that it was dangerous so to set the heart on one's children.

"What would you do if you should lose one of your children?" said one of these anxious friends one day.

I do not think that, as a rule, a happy mother ever realizes that it is possible that *her* child will die. At all events I had not before faced that question; but I looked up at my friend and said, after a moment's silence: "Do? I should thank God that He had given them to me forever, and go on loving them with all my soul, wherever they were." And I went on, only loving them more and more day by day.

I thank God that I did, and that all the love that it was possible for my nature to give, I gave them. I remember, however, that one day, when they were playing together, laughing with mutual glee as Harry buried his baby hands in Mary's sunny curls, the thought suddenly flashed across my heart, what *could* I do if God called away either of my darlings, and which of the two could I live without. Within a year God had more than answered my question. He had taken them both to Himself. And yet again He had comforted me, in His own mysterious way of comforting,

not in my way, but in His. And He had made me strong and calm.

I have said little of Harry. He was Mary's opposite in every physical aspect. He was dark as she was fair, reserved as she was demonstrative, singularly mature for a little child, and with a look, in the deepest and darkest eyes that I have ever seen in a baby's face, that revealed a strange power of loving in the soul behind the eyes.

The two babies were inseparable. Their delight in each other grew day by day, and it used to seem to me that nothing could add to the happiness of our home or our joy in living; and always through it all ran the consciousness that my mother knew our joy and shared in our caring for our little ones. In a little while this last thought was to become of exceeding sweetness to me.

One day, by a strange oversight on the part of one who loved him much, and who, I am thankful to say, never knew that she had caused the accident, Harry had a terrible fall, striking upon his head.

The summer was a very trying one, all over the country, for little children; and although we were in a favored locality, it was very hot even there, and Harry was teething. He had a strong constitution, but as the weeks went by after his fall, it became evident that the brave little life was growing constantly weaker, Mary in the meantime watching him with wistful, wondering eyes, and using every possible baby wile to gladden the little brother she loved so much.

But neither Mary's love nor any other love could detain the vanishing life. One who loved him indeed

had learned before that day that God's heart is wiser and more tender than the wisest and tenderest human love, and she could not fear that loss would come to her baby, if the Father called him home, but rather the added gain that comes to the souls led forward in paths of the Father's choosing. And yet the mother was human and was sounding new depths of suffering as she went with her baby down into the billows that were to bear him from her sight. Yet still she hoped.

A night came when she was to meet a new experience and to learn what it may have meant when it was written that the disciples were "sleeping for sorrow." She had known that her baby's death was almost inevitable, yet still she hoped. Looking into the doctor's face, she said very quietly, "Doctor, isn't there any hope?"

"I am sorry to tell you so, but I can see none. I am afraid he is even now dying."

The mother said nothing and the doctor soon went his way. Several hours later she heard some one, as at a distance, say to another: "What shall we do? We cannot rouse her and we cannot leave her a moment. Every time the baby moans, she taxes our strength to hold the cradle steady under her hands. What shall we do?"

The mother heard these words, the first she had heard for hours. She had not been asleep; conscious weariness never came to her when her beloved were ill. She had been benumbed by sorrow and capable of responding to nothing but the moan of her dying child. She found herself, as she aroused, bending forward, grasping the cradle with both hands. She unloosed

her grasp, leaned back in her chair, and said: "I am myself again. I think the doctor's words benumbed my brain a little. Raise my baby on the pillow and let me see him. Perhaps I may make his dying easier."

In any ordinary illness, in proportion to its severity, she had had a strange power to soothe a child held near to her. They laid him in her arms, and very quietly and tenderly she held the baby as the long hours of the night, the morning, and the forenoon passed away.

Again and again they begged her to lay him in his cradle, but she still held him, while, hour by hour, he seemed passing deeper into the unresponding silence of death. There was no sense of weariness, no selfish withholding of the soul so dear to hers from the One whispering, "Suffer little children to come unto Me," but rather an inexpressible love going on with the dear little life apparently trembling away into the silence.

There was not the faintest expectation of a possible recognition or farewell. It was simply an irrepressible longing to go with her baby to the very verge of his earthly life. She had not prayed that he might live on, on the earth. God knew her love for the child. She knew what she had always asked for him, — the best that even He could give; and she did not for a moment doubt God's power or will to give to her baby the best in any world. And by a strange exaltation, God was lifting her soul to a height of love that made her forget herself wholly in her love for her child. She was not holding him to the earth. She was willing to

accept God's will concerning him, and she was truly loving him with all her soul.

Suddenly, a change came over the little face, set already, as it seemed, in the stillness of death. The little body relaxed, the eyes, deep, dark, beautiful as never before, and filled, as it seemed, with an unspeakable message of love, opened full into the mother's eyes bending over them; and the most ecstatic smile that mother ever has seen or was ever to see glorified her baby's face.

There was not a vestige of pain resting on the little face. It seemed as if minutes went by while the eyes of the child and the mother held each other, and the smile grew ever the more radiant. And yet it was not like one of the old-time smiles, and the eyes held not their old-time greeting. It was a soul's farewell to another soul that was to be left behind, for a time, in the sorrows and cares of earth.

As truly as if he had spoken to her, the baby's soul said to his mother's, "I have come to you again, back from the very border-land. You know, now, that I have not forgotten and I shall not forget. You will go your way and I will go mine, and in such a little while you will find me again. And I shall go on loving you as I love you now, and you will love me as you love now, only in each of us, love will grow till we meet again."

Then the baby withdrew his eyes and looked about, apparently for the father he loved so much, unavoidably absent in a distant city. Then turning his eyes again full upon his mother's, the same expression of immortal love filled them, the same radiant smile

transfigured his face, faded slowly, the eyes closed gently and opened no more on the earth. Gently and quietly, but with no returning consciousness, the little life slowly ebbed away.

Even on his father's return, that beloved voice had no power to raise again the drooping eyelids; but to the mother had come the blessed gift of new ties of motherhood, spiritual ties, immortal ties, utterly indestructible ties, that were to bind her to this little child, gone forward from her sheltering arms into the welcoming care of the dear Lord Jesus, in a conscious love over which neither death nor distance nor time should have any power, — ties that were to grow the stronger and the dearer as one by one other little children from the same earthly home were to go forward, following the dear little boy who entered into the life immortal that sweet September afternoon so long ago.

Will it seem strange if I add that as my baby passed into his final sleeping, I felt that I lifted him and laid him in my absent mother's arms and said to myself, "Perhaps the dear Lord Jesus who knew how much she loved all little children and how much she must love my baby, will let her care for him until he feels at home in heaven"? At all events I did feel so.

And again, God the Comforter drew very near to both of us who had loved our baby so, and my mother and my baby went beside me as it were in a glorified silence into other depths of bereavement that lay before me in the near future.

We laid our baby down to sleep. It seemed hard to leave him alone in a solitary little grave that we could

seldom visit, and my mother's grave was opened and the little casket placed on hers; and we turned again to the home lonely to all of us, but, as I learned later, lonely most to the little sister, who could in no wise understand the absence of the brother she had loved so much, nor the silence that had fallen into her sunshine.

But she was the most sunny, winsome, self-forgetful little soul that I have ever known; and not understanding at all the change that had come, she did her baby best to fill up the measure of our delight. "Mamma's Comfort," I called her one day, and after that when she was especially loving she often called herself "Mamma's Tumfort."

I do not think we let her see our sadness. We loved her all the more and filled her life from waking to sleeping with sunshine and joy, and hour by hour thanked God the more deeply that she was spared to us.

One day, eight months after Harry died, she did not seem quite her normal self. The next day we knew that she was suffering from scarlatina, "a slight attack," as our doctor said.

I suppose it might have proved "a slight attack," but there was, as events showed, an error in judgment, which we learned too late; and before we realized that she was seriously ill, she was beyond human helping.

I cannot describe the night that she lay dying. She was our first-born, our absolutely satisfying one, and seemed knit into our very souls as if she were a part of each of our lives, as she truly was. All night long we watched beside her, the dear little daughter never once before in her brief life unresponsive to our words of

love. Then the daylight came. The sweet May sunlight filled the room. She suddenly lay still, with her little hand resting in mine, and closed her eyes and went to the land not lonely for her, because there, waiting for her, dwelt the dear Lord Jesus and the tender mother heart, so akin to that of the Lord Jesus, and the dear little brother whom she had loved so much and never forgotten.

I have never understood the calmness that came into my soul, as I laid down her precious little hands, folding within them the last kiss that I was ever to press there. Later, I prepared her for her last resting place, in perfect quietness and without any words. There were weighty reasons why I must be calm and strong, and God helped me to be. He strengthened me, if not by conscious comforting, by showing me clearly that I must be self-controlled for the sake of another life depending on mine. God offers many varied motives for living, to those who ought to live. Thus He sometimes comforts indirectly by holding souls in patience until they are able to receive the fulness of His peace.

I was calm, as I have said, but I remember well the shock of strange surprise that came to me when, after I had dressed her for the last time, and laid her down forever out of my arms, going out on the veranda, and looking with unseeing eyes at the world, sight suddenly came into them, and I noted the changes that the week had brought, — the trees abloom, the grass in full verdure, the birds singing as if the world had never been so full of joy before, — and my darling dead, my little daughter gone forever from the beauty, the music, the love of earth. Was it *possible?* Could I live without

her? Had I lost her? Yes, thank God, I could live, live all the more faithfully because God had given her to me, and such a gift I could not lose, unless I tore myself from God and her.

She was very beautiful as she lay in her little casket, strewn with primroses and lilies of the valley, her golden curls clustering about her head, a favorite dolly resting on her little arm, as so often when she lay sleeping. I could not go with her to her distant grave beside my mother's, but to my own surprise I bade the little body good-by in perfect peace and calmness, and saw my husband depart with the dear little casket, still thanking God above everything else that He had given me those precious ties that neither death nor time nor distance could destroy.

I could not understand myself. The peace in which I was held was a mystery. I had loved this child with my whole soul. She was dead and had vanished forever from my mortal eyes; yet I was abiding in perfect peace, I was not even weeping. Ah! was it because I was beginning to understand God, to know something more of the power of immortal love, of utterly unselfish mother love? And was it possible that my mother was near, nearer even than the next room?

I cannot explain any of it. I only know that these were the facts, that this was my actual mental and spiritual condition. I was truly proving God's power to comfort.

The burial over, my husband returned, and we took up our changed life, brought infinitely nearer to each other, both by the depths of pain and the heights of

spiritual experience through which our bereavements were leading us.

Then, a few weeks later, the Angel of Life hovered again over our home, and another little child was laid in my arms. Until his birth I had been kept in perfect calmness; after that, I suddenly became very weak, and it seemed to all that my life was rapidly ebbing. I was still calm, but the will to live on on the earth seemed to have left me, and I was not conscious of the old-time mother love for the child.

The baby was a large, beautiful boy; but, unlike other babies, he did not cry. The nurse said to me one day: "I never heard anything so pitiful as this baby's sighs. I wish he would cry like other babies. It's unnatural for a baby to sigh so." But he did not cry, and he continued to sigh, and I was so ill that it made little impression upon me.

One day I was exceedingly weak, unable even to move without aid. In the evening the nurse said quietly, "I don't want to frighten you, but I am afraid your baby is very ill." I knew by her tone that she thought him dying, or already dead.

The shock seemed to fill my veins with new life. I raised myself unaided and said, "Lay him in my arms." She did so; then, adjusting the pillows, went for assistance. The baby was not dead, he was in convulsions, passing rapidly from one to another. I held him in my arms till nearly morning; then I lay down for an hour or two, and at daylight rose, dressed, and gave myself without thought of my own physical condition to caring for my baby.

Our new physician, a most careful and skilful man,

gave us no hope for the little life. Instead, a day or two later he said to me: "Do not pray for your baby's life, for I fear that if he lives, these terrible convulsions will have wrecked him mentally. It may be best for him and for you that God should take him."

I said little; I was calm and strong again, but I remember, as if it were yesterday, the intense will to live that I might serve my child so long as he needed me that filled my soul. I was still unconscious of the old joyous love such as I had before felt for my children; but I realized at once that God had given me a motive for living that would carry me to an extreme old age, if my child continued to have great need of me. Verily God had strengthened me according to my need, even if for a while I was to be unconscious of vital comfort.

For a day or two longer the little life hovered in the balance, then a change of treatment proved effective, even after we had ceased to hope, and returning life brought quietness and strength to the baby form.

In the meantime unusual strength had been given to me. I was perfectly calm and apparently unconscious of weariness, and even after the baby rallied experienced no reaction. There was still present the benumbing sense of pain created by the loss of Harry and Mary, that had become so dominant in my days of physical weakness; but I knew that my life on the earth was needed, that God would give me strength according to my day, and comfort, in His own good time; and I thankfully took up again the life that I saw so clearly was essential to the little one in my arms.

Once recovered from the physical strain upon his

life, which our physicians attributed to the effect upon his mother of the little daughter's death, our baby, Jamie, proved to be a veritable incarnation of joy and sunshine in our home. I have never seen a more joyous baby. He had but one real crying spell in his little life of nearly a year. He often awakened himself apparently from the soundest sleep by merry laughter. Opening his eyes suddenly, he would look about him, and finding his mother's eyes smiling back into his, he would close his again and go back to finish the interrupted sleep.

He had not a trace of nervousness or fretfulness about him. When he was ten months old, he weighed thirty pounds and gave every promise of a perfect mental and physical life. I mention these facts to prove that if his mother had found the great strain of his little sister's death too heavy for her to bear without serious physical results to him at first, as a whole the influences preceding his birth had made for strength and healthfulness of body and brain, in short, for promise to the coming life.

God had indeed been with me through it all, and given me strength to go on at least in quietness. It was simply quietness, it was not joy. It did not seem then that I ever could again be joyous; but I was to learn that God's *Word* inspires one to joyous living as truly as do His visible gifts.

I was reading my Bible one day, conscious only that God was giving me grace to say day by day, "Thy will be done," when my eye fell upon this verse in Hebrews, "Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the *rejoicing of the hope* firm unto the end."

That word, "rejoicing," spoke to my soul almost like a clarion call to a new height of living. It seemed meant for me personally, — a call to live, — whatever came to me of bereavement, of struggle, of seeming loss — "rejoicing." It struck my soul almost like a blow. Over and over again, I said to myself, "I cannot rejoice; I cannot. I can say, 'Thy will be done'; but I cannot, cannot rejoice." But I seemed to be in the grip of a call that I could not turn away from. For days I struggled with the thought, "Can God ask me to rejoice?"

Slowly He lifted me to understand a little of the meaning of the words to those who first heard them, facing separations, the loss of all things, yes, even martyrdom, and of all they had meant to the myriads since; and then by imperceptible degrees I began to accept even that will, and a minor song began to rise in my soul and faint whisperings of "the rejoicing of the hope."

It was a severe test, but it marked a new departure in my spiritual life. The broadened thought of God alone remained with me, and unconsciously the pulses of my natural life grew stronger and richer, and my power of conscious loving slowly reawakened. Till this time I had had little sense of my former power of loving. Even my baby I had watched without any of the ecstasy of mother love; but in the spiritual struggle that came to me, gladness in love and in service grew again, and soon all the sweet abandon of mother love throbbed through my soul. Then how I loved him! How intensely I loved him! It was like new wine, and yet under it all was the consciousness, once wholly

unrealized, that my baby's life might suddenly pass on into the higher spheres.

Yet even that consciousness did not now make me tremble. I had learned that, whatever might come, God would give me grace to go through it, if it was necessary that I should remain upon the earth. And I simply thanked Him with all my heart that He had renewed my power of intense loving, and, more than that, given me the power to rejoice in all His will.

And thus the hours and days, each sweeter and more beautiful than the one before it, passed swiftly by, and my baby, one of the sunniest, happiest little souls my eyes ever looked upon, grew apace. I had but one fear in those golden days. I shivered mentally now and then, as I looked forward to the swiftly coming anniversary days of Mary's going from me, and wondered often how I could go through them without in any way affecting seriously the little life that, although so joyous, was yet so dependent upon my health and moods.

I tried not to look forward, but to stay myself on the thought that God would carry me through them; and He did, but in how unforeseen a way.

The period that I had dreaded lay between May first and May sixth. The last week in April, Jamie was, by events beyond my control, exposed to a sudden cold. Croup resulted. Our physician, who perfectly understood the child's constitution, was seriously ill and could not attend him. The one we called to him, misled by the child's magnificent physique and a rare power of self-control that he had possessed from his earliest days, could not realize that he was so seriously ill till he was beyond the aid of medical help; and I had again

the distress of seeing a child die whose life apparently might have been saved.

The little soul passed as bravely as he had lived. At noontide he lay quietly in my arms, where he had so often lain, apparently falling asleep, but it was into the sleep that knows no waking here.

Then again I dressed a beloved child for his last, long sleep, and laid him gently down out of my arms forever, — as I believed, into "the dear arms that tenderer are than mine."

I was perfectly calm, calmer than I am to-day as I sit recalling those long-past hours.

We sat together, that night, in our again bereaved home, unable to sleep, but finding, each in proportion to our need, the strange peace, and, may I say, the special comfort God gives to those still owning in indestructible spiritual ties a little soul that has passed on from the earthly into the heavenly home.

I remember the deepened peace that came to me, as his father read to me sentence after sentence from our dear old family Bible, — notably this, "We asked life of thee and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever."

The following afternoon, funeral services were again held in our home, and this time together we went forth, carrying our baby to his burial in a distant state.

I had wondered how I was to meet the early hours of May first. I met them in perfect calmness, uplifted by a new and most painful bereavement into heights of strength and peace I could not have foreseen before they came to me.

It seemed to me, as I rode through the silent night and

on through the awakening dawn, to the old home where I had once lived with my mother, that all my earthly past lay years behind me, and that only God and service were essential; that I had learned that human ties, even the dearest, could not be broken, although they might be lifted above human cognizance. Again there was that strange sense that my mother knew, that she shared, and that the dear little child, still so near to us and yet so far, might be, yes was, nearer to her than he had ever been to me in the flesh.

I have never tried to explain to myself why it always seemed perfectly natural to me, as one by one I gave my children back to God, to believe with deep assurance that in some way God would let my mother care for my little ones, newly come to heaven, as once He had let her care for me, newly come to earth.

Come from whence it may, I did have this feeling, and it was an element of much comfort in the depths of natural distress that I must unavoidably ford in the lonely days to come.

On the afternoon of the first of May we laid the little body beside our other little ones. The beautiful river glided quietly by, the solemn mountains stood in their impassive strength in the distance, the sunniest of May-day skies bent over us, and the earliest birds of spring sang all about us; but the earthly sunshine and beauty and melody that had been ours had vanished, gone down into those little graves. All human delight seemed eclipsed, and only the peace of God, only the joy those find who are willing to suffer His will as well as to do it, as they may, remained.

I remember still the strange sense of quietness and

strength with which I turned to face my life again. I was sure that God would keep me strong, but I could not see from what secret source the gladness of life could again come to me.

A few days later a long-buried hand brought to me almost infinite comfort and cheer.

As it were by chance, in the home of a friend I opened a book on the Roman catacombs. I looked at it listlessly, then suddenly became intent on a message to me. It was simply the record of an inscription above the burial place of a baby in the catacombs. It read thus: "In Peace. Felix our beloved child, aged one year." That was all they wrote of their beloved baby.

This is what the legend said to me: "Almost two thousand years ago those other parents buried a Felix, a beloved child. Their lives looked as long to them as they looked forward to their lonely years without him, as yours do to you to-day, without your baby 'aged one year,' and yet remember for your comfort how short their parting was in reality, compared to the hundreds of years in which they have been reunited. They laid their baby down 'in peace.' Whoever they were and to whatever fate they were to go forward, to martyrdom or to life in the lonely catacombs, God went with them and comforted and guided them, till, in such a little while, He lifted them up into the life eternal, whither before them He had gathered in their baby, their 'blessèd' baby, as blessèd to them as was your baby to you; blessèd in his coming and in his going and in the meeting yet to be."

Again I had been lifted by a Power not of myself,

but as I truly believed by the comforting Spirit of God, on to a new and higher plane of living. Again I took up my life with renewed strength and a peace and joy, yes, a gladness in life that no coming change or sorrow was ever to destroy. The years were to bring to me a renewal of the deepest home joys. Children were to be given us who were to remain with us. One more little life was to come to us but for a day, and then go forward into the home where, abiding in the peace of the blessèd, our other beloved awaited her coming.

We had been greatly gladdened by the coming of another little daughter to our arms, and my friends feared that her unforeseen death would affect me seriously; but again, and even more strongly than at any time since the night of my mother's dying, and in some respects even more strongly than then, came the great uplifting assurance of the indestructibility of all true human loving, and such a consciousness of the brevity of all human suffering as compared with the endless duration of the eternal peace and joy, and a sense of the all-consoling, uplifting power of the presence of God, that my soul seemed to find no depths of suffering, but only heights of peace and joy in God. And when my baby Amy was borne away from me to her burial, she seemed hardly to have vanished from my presence, and she has never seemed very far away from me.

As our remaining children grew to maturity, great as was our happiness in them, they did not seem much more real or near to us, when absent, than were the "blessèd" ones who had been for years among the immortals.

To a degree that I cannot explain, there always seemed, if I may so speak, a double atmosphere in our home, — one, enshrining my mother and my unseen children and dear ones whom my husband had early loved and lost; the other, holding those still living on the earth.

I have never been in the slightest degree drawn towards spiritualism; but as the years have gone by, I have learned lessons of indirect helping, coming as I could but believe from sources that God allowed to minister to me, supplementing, but in no degree taking the place of, His direct guidance.

I cannot explain these experiences, even to myself, — I have tried rather to accept them simply as some of the minor proofs of God's great goodness to me. In hours of physical danger I have had the consciousness of surrounding care, breaking the force of whatever was happening, and holding me without fear while in jeopardy. In hours of real spiritual danger, unable for the time to see the way clearly, I have, if I may so speak reverently, felt almost as if there stood by me a lesser angel than the one who appeared of old in Gethsemane, strengthening me for *my* conflict, a lesser conflict indeed, and yet so heavy that only the grace of God, direct or indirect, could have carried me through.

Thus, a faith in God that nothing henceforth could disturb, and a sense of growing companionship with my beloved gone forward, that nothing could break, had become my inalienable portion. Thus I had proved by vital experience the infinite power of God to comfort, to inspire, to guide. I was always to be poor. I had been greatly bereaved. I had still years of heavy care awaiting me; but I had truly tasted

the waters of Life. I knew by experience the Eternal Life they win who know "the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent."

And so strengthened, made rich and glad, joyous even, in the hope that I might yet learn more of God, more and more truly have grace given me to do or to suffer His will, I went forward with steadfast eyes and unflinching faith to meet the remaining years.

CHAPTER IX

SUNSET HOURS

I HAVE recalled in these pages, as frankly and as simply as I could, the unfailing goodness of God in every bereavement that came to me. All my life long, other cares, less acute than my sorrows, and yet often exhausting and many times sorely perplexing, were allotted to me, and I was often greatly tempted to resist things that seemed unjust, coming in from the outer world, or to try to arrange my life after the manner that seemed just to me; and it was often very difficult for me to let "my soul wait in stillness upon God."

But the paths that my Father had appointed for my treading I could not escape from. And to-day, looking back upon my hedged-in pathway, I see clearly that His ways were wiser and tenderer than any of my own choosing could have been. These were lessons that I learned slowly, and they were not fully mastered till the closing hours of my active years. Yet now that those years are nearly numbered, I realize that, in the long succession of my days, my God has been teaching me the precious truth that while there is no sorrow possible to any soul that may not lead to heights of peace, unknown but for its uplifting power,

no burden so heavy that God's grace cannot enable the one who bears it to walk bravely, sometimes even joyously, forward under it, while there is no seeming loss that God cannot transfigure into conscious gain, there can also be no temptation, ay more wondrous still, no sin, turned away from in deep loathing, that shall not give to the truly repentant and deeply humbled soul a blessèd sense of the cleansing, healing, energizing life of one born again in God.

One source of comfort and of blessing, that my God bestowed upon me, as my years were passing by, lay in the very sweet and precious friendships He continued to lead me to. Some of these friendships almost startle me as I recall their peculiar adaptation to the needs in which they found me, and in the blessings which their coming brought me. I shall not attempt to describe these friendships; for while many of my friends have gone forward into the perfect life and friendship, others still remain upon the earth, some dwelling upon the border-land, others, as I trust, with many years of active service and deepening joy in God still before them.

Thus my life, studded with cares and sorrows, as men measure care and sorrow, has been enriched from my earliest years by friend after friend given to me, as I believe, in eternal possession, sharing with me, as I with them, the best that life had brought us, going on with me as we went forward to whatever life held for us.

I have often questioned if to many have been given any more perfect friendships than God has given to me. From my sunniest morning hours they have inspired and strengthened me; they have broadened and

beautified my life; they have often made me forget my external limitations. Those that are still mortal deeply bless and enrich my life to-day; and I thank God that I have learned, from those gone forward, that there is a phase in human friendship over which Death and Time have no power, that there is a spiritual telepathy that "the clods of the valley" cannot interrupt, much less destroy. I have come to believe, beyond my soul's power of doubting, that some that men call the dead, do not forget, that they may sometimes greatly serve us if we are spiritually and responsively in touch with them; and I have proved also, to my own deep joy, that they may even move us to help them to finish some of their own incompleted service. I know that these things are true, because my Lord and Master has made my soul ready and willing to learn these truths, and enabled me to receive them in great peace and humility.

Experience also taught me the truth in Mrs. Browning's words, "The silence of life more pathetic than death's," and I more than once turned away in sadness from what seemed sundered friendships; but I learned, as the years went by, that every high, true affection has an immortal pulse and cannot die.

I also learned to know that one of the sweet surprises that God holds for us in His own tender keeping, ready to be revealed to us when we need it, — here on the earth or hereafter in the Great Meeting, — is the coming back to us of our own again. I have met friends who had seemed to have utterly vanished, gone away into "the silence of life"; yet meeting as it were by accident, each has known, in the instant of meeting,

that there had been no real parting, no spiritual silence, but that all unconsciously both had been going forward side by side, each the braver and truer because of the old-time fellowship. There are others whom I have not yet met again, but I have come to believe whole-heartedly that nothing nobly worthy can be lost, that somewhere, somehow, in God's good time, I shall learn that nothing true has been destroyed or left forever behind, and not one prayer for any one I loved has fallen fruitless, unforeseen as may sometimes have been the manner of the answer.

In previous pages I have dwelt somewhat fully upon the special comfortings that have been given to me after I had entered into deep sorrows. One line of experience, which may perhaps be less common, — I at least have not often heard others refer to similar ones, — has been what I have felt to be a sort of spiritual premonition of coming sorrow. No bereavement since my mother's death, and no other spiritual trial, has come without a special drawing near to God in prayer, impressed, as I learned to believe, by a Power outside myself.

Often for several days before the coming of a special need, I would feel impelled to pray for a greater nearness to God. It was not that I felt fear. My sky would seem perfectly clear, and yet there would be the constant feeling, sleeping or waking, that I had some new need of direct strength from God; and then suddenly the burden of the new need would be upon me, and even with the new need fresh supplies of strength would come welling into my life.

As the years passed on I had come to believe that it

was probable that my life would go on without any further distinctive experiences, that I had climbed most of my mountain summits, and passed through most of the valleys that had awaited me, and that it might be appointed me to go down into the sunset hours of my life more intent upon the blessèd memories of my past and my hope for the life to be revealed, than taxed by present conflicts. In short, I felt that the struggles of my spiritual life on the earth were virtually completed. Yes there was one more valley awaiting me as I came towards the sunset hours, a valley through which my pathway was henceforth to lie, shrouded in a darkness illumined by no ray of natural sunlight.

Blindness came to me, sudden and inescapable. All the beauty of the visible world was shut out, and I learned fully what it seemed to me I had only faintly realized before, the intensity of my delight in the beautiful things of earth. The glories of the sunrise and sunset, the indescribable calm and splendor of the procession of the moon and the stars, the exquisite charm of the shadows floating over the distant hills, the silvery beauty of sea and river, the restful verdure of the grass and the living grace of tree and flower, — faded from my eyes almost in the hours of one brief day; and I felt that they were going, never to return.

And yet my God held me in absolute calm. I knew there could be no mistake, because He willed it.

But for this assurance, this experience must have been to me an unfathomable mystery; for it seemed beyond question that I had imperative need of my sight, a need that grew no less as the months went by, and unavoid-

able difficulties pressed me sorely. And yet again, and with a fulness unknown in any previous experiences, rich as they had seemed to me as they came one by one, there came to me, as I believe from my God, new gifts that kept me hour by hour in peace and quietness waiting upon Him, led me eventually to heights of blessedness I had not expected this side heaven, and proved to me that there was *no* imperative need for *my* soul, at least, save God. Again I learned that "man shall not live by bread alone."

Then again my God gave to me another and, in some respects, a higher revelation of Himself, of His power to comfort, to make strong, and to make rich and glad in the depths of seeming loss; and almost before I realized the fulness of His power, even in this He had transfigured the cross that had seemed so heavy, when I took it into my trembling hands, — for they did tremble when I bent forward to lift it, — and I found it raising me, into something of solitude perhaps, — for they that be blind must within those lines walk solitary, — but into a solitude wherein my soul more truly found God than in any previous experience, whether of joy or of sorrow, wherein it found the God of the "still, small voice," the God of inexhaustible light, the God of unfailing love, the glorious "Power not of ourselves," the Power able to save us from sin, able to comfort and sustain in the utmost depths of human sorrow, the God able to fill with overflowing life and gladness the weariest, saddest, most heavily burdened heart that earth has ever known.

This God, once unknown, had answered my earliest prayer. He had indeed taught me to know Him and

to know myself. He had led me into absolute rest and peace. He had filled my soul with courage that nothing henceforth could appall, and my darkened eyes with the glory of the coming sunrise.

Casting a backward look upon all my past, gathering into a whole every experience that my God has sent me, the joys, the sorrows, the burdens, the uplifting crosses, the answered prayers that sometimes seem to have emptied my hands and hedged my pathway, — lifting the emptied hands Godward, turning the wandering feet heavenward, — have I not reason to say that my God in answering my prayers has made me a happy and a blessèd woman, even as I sit, old and blind and with many another limitation, facing the sunrise of the eternal morning?

Ah! well was it for me, well far beyond the dreams of my childhood, that a mother able to make Jesus Christ real to the soul of her child had been given to me; well, beyond my faintest imaginings, that in my joyous girlhood I had listened to the "still, small voice" asking, "Why not now seek God?" well that my God had taken me at my word and led me by the surest, if often by strait and painful paths unto Himself.

Blessèd for me had been every sorrow, every seeming loss, every mastered temptation, blessèd alike all God's gifts and all his withholdings, blessèd all His holy will concerning me; and just as blessèd, yes just as blessèd, the assurance that all that God has given to me, and been to me, He will give, He will be, to every soul that honestly seeks Him, and that every sorrowful soul may find in Him all that I have found of guidance, of comfort, of peace.

Blessèd for me that I have proved the infinite tenderness of the promise, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you"; blessèd, however hard of attaining, the heights whereon I learned something of the infinite sweetness of the parting words of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"Peace I leave with you.

"My peace I give unto you.

"NOT AS THE WORLD GIVETH, GIVE I UNTO YOU.

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Blessèd be God, even the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Father of Mercies, and the God of all comfort;

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation.

—2 Cor. i. 3, 4.

MAY 18 1906

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Nov. 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION
111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

BV
4905

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 014 727 526 2
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 029 789 359 2