



ROSA'S QUEST
OR
THE WAY TO THE BEAUTIFUL LAND
BY
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To my mother, who abides in the "beautiful land," I dedicate this, my first book.

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I.

"HOW MUCH IS THE FARE?"

"Rosa! Rosa!"

"Yes'm, Mis' Gray, I'm coming."

"Well, fer land sakes then, hurry up, you lazy girl! I've been a-hollerin' till my throat's sore. You're always underfoot when you ain't wanted, then when you are wanted, you're no place to be found. If you wuz my girl, you'd be learnt to know more'n you know now, I can tell you that. I believe in young uns amountin' to somethin', but it's mighty little you know."

"But, Mis' Gray," faltered poor little Rosa, "mother was coughing awful, and I didn't hear you."

"Yes, your ma ag'in. I don't know what you'll have fer an excuse when she's gone, or what'll become of you either. I know one thing, though; I won't have you. But it'd be a heap sight better fer you if I would, and a real blessin', too."

"Why, where's mother going, Mis' Gray?" asked Rosa with wide-open and frightened eyes.

"There, there, Sary, don't talk to the child so! Never mind, Rosa dear, Sary don't mean it. Sary's a good woman, yes, a very good woman."

"I do too mean it, father, and I jest want you to keep still. You always take her part. Yes, I am a good woman, or I'd never kep' you after poor Tom got killed. I have to sew my finger ends off to git us enough to eat and to pay the rent. I always did have bad luck from the day I married Tom Gray. He would insist on keepin' you, and you wuz sick that summer he couldn't git no work. He'd walk all day a-tryin' to find somethin' to do, then set up all night with you, though I told him it wuzn't necessary. I washed and I sewed and I done everything, but our little home had to go. I thought then, and I think now, that we could a-kep' it, if it hadn't been fer you. If Tom could git hold of a cent at all, it would go fer medicine, or somethin' fer you to eat. After you got well, he found a place to work, and wuz a-tryin' to git back the home, when he went and got killed, a-tryin' to keep a poor, good-fer-nothin' beggar from bein' run over by the streetcar. All he left me wuz you to look after, and you ain't never had a bit of sense, since the day he wuz brought home to me all torn and bleedin'. There ain't many that's had as much to put up with as I have. I guess most daughters-in-law would jest have told you to leave, but no, I've been a-keepin' you fer the last five years, and no tellin' how much longer you'll live! And you didn't mind me this mornin', and I sprained my ankle a-goin'—"

"Grandpa," broke in Rosa, heedless of Mrs. Gray's irascible tongue, "what does she mean about mother going away?"

"Why, I don't know, child; I ain't heard no talk about her leavin', but then I git things so mixed up since Tom died."

"Rosa Browning, I didn't call you in here to ask foolish questions. I want you to deliver this package, and quick, too. If you hadn't talked so much, you could be well on your way by this time. It goes to that lady over on Lake Avenue, where I sent you once before."

"Oh, where I heard the beautiful music?"

"Yes, but don't you loiter on your way to listen to no music! Fine music ain't for the likes of us here on Burton street. It's a shame fer me to have to pay your carfare, but I 'spose you can't carry that big package so far. If you'd spend a little more time a-workin', and a little less a-lookin' after your ma, you'd have more strength, I won't have it said that I git work done fer nothin', so I'll give you ten cents besides. You git a piece of beefsteak with it, and I'll broil it fer your ma's supper. You couldn't fix it fit to eat, nohow. I hope to goodness she won't cough all night and keep me awake."

"Oh, thank you, Mis' Gray, you are so kind," delightedly exclaimed Rosa, her wan little face lighting up with genuine pleasure at the thought that that mother was going to have something good for supper.

"Now do be gone, and don't talk no more. You're enough to set me crazy, you and father."

"I'm off now, Mis' Gray. Goodby, grandpa dear," she affectionately said, kissing the old man's withered cheek, for these two children of the tenement, the one eight and the other eighty, were the best of friends.

"Rosa," called once again Mrs. Gray's shrill voice, as the child was making her way across the dark hall, "come back here!"

"Yes'm, Mis' Gray, here I am."

"You're so awful careless, you see to it that you don't lose that money I give you. If you do, you'll be sorry. You won't git the pay fer the work; I wouldn't trust you with that, nohow. Now hurry up and don't waste another minute! Wait! can't you [Pg 10]give me a chance to tell you what I want? You're so provokin'. Be sure to tell your ma where you're goin', and that it'll take you about an hour and a half. I don't want her a-gettin' scared and a-hollerin' 'round and a-sendin' some one after you, like she did that day you didn't git home till dark. She acted ridiculous, as if she thought you never would come back. I couldn't fer the life of me see what made her do so; it was real silly, and I told her so at the time. I did think, though, that you'd ought to be licked fer not hurryin' up more, but she jest kissed you and cried all the more when I said so. Go and tell her now, and be sure you don't drop that package in the dirt."

This time Rosa started on a run, lest she might be called back once more. She feared the tyrant, but vainly endeavored to love her for grandpa's sake. He so often told her that "Sary was a good woman, yes, a very good woman."

"Mother dear," she said, upon entering their one poverty-stricken, but scrupulously neat, little room, "I'm going to deliver a package over on Lake Avenue for Mis' Gray, and will not be back for about an hour and a half, she told me to tell you; and she gave me ten cents, too. Ain't that nice? I'm going to get some beefsteak, and she'll broil it.

"But, mother, she said something about your going [Pg 11]away, and didn't know what would become of me. You won't move, will you, without taking me along? I don't know what she could have meant. What did she mean, anyhow? Why do you cry, mother dear?" tremulously inquired the child, rushing impulsively up to the side of the bed.

"We'll talk when you come back, darling. Kiss me, my precious"; and the sufferer fell back upon her pillow, coughing violently, and moaning for very agony of spirit.

With a heart heavier than the huge package, Rosa sped down the steep stairway, out into the bitter December weather.

"Oh," she said, half audibly, "how cold it is! I'm glad I haven't far to go to take the car."

Quickly her nimble feet carried her, and in a few minutes she was scrutinizing the faces of her fellow-passengers. Sitting across the aisle from her was a young lady, who to Rosa seemed the embodiment of beauty and elegance. While intently studying the fair face and neat costume, this object of her admiration suddenly crossed the car and sat down by her side. The sweet smile and cordial greeting made the child forget her timidity, and soon the two were conversing most familiarly.

"And so you are going to deliver that package over on Lake Avenue, are you?"

"Yes'm, and Mis' Gray gave me ten cents fer it, too. I'm going to get some steak, and she will broil it for mother's supper. Ain't that nice? I'd think I'd be happy, but I ain't a bit. I keep wondering what she meant about mother going away, and she didn't know what would become of me. Why, lady, mother just can't move now; she's sick and has a dreadful cough! She hasn't even been in to see grandpa and Mis' Gray for a long time. Then I know, anyhow, she'd never go and leave me. Of course she wouldn't, for we're always together. She couldn't get along without me, 'cause I take care of her, and I know I couldn't get along without her at all. Mis' Gray ought to know that, for we've lived by her a long time. What do you 'spose she meant? I can't think about anything else."

"Why, my little girl," replied the stranger, while Rosa was more mystified than ever to see the blue eyes fill with tears, "sometimes when people are sick, they go to a better country than this. Do you know about heaven?"

"Not much, ma'am. When Mis' Gray goes away and mother's working, grandpa gets his old violin and sings to me about the beautiful land. He says that's heaven, but he can't explain it much to me. He says he can't think right since Tom got killed. You know[Pg 13] Tom was his boy. Grandpa is so good. When mother moves, I know she will take me, and I wish he could go too. But, lady, do you 'spose that's the place where mother's going?"

"I hope so, dear, for she would not cough any more there."

"Oh, wouldn't she? I'll tell her about it, then. But how much is the fare? We're poor, you know."

"You do not have to pay any fare to go to that beautiful land, because Jesus paid it all long ago."

"Oh, how kind! He must be so good. Last night I wakened, and mother kissed me and said that Jesus surely would take care of me. Are you real sure He paid the fare for everybody?"

"Yes, I know it, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"Ain't that pretty! But where do you start from to get there?"

"Your mother could go right from your home."

"But she just ain't able to go any place; she can't sit up much now. I'll tell her about it, though, then when she's better, we'll both go. Does it take long to get there?"

"No, not so very."

"I wish we'd known it before it got so cold. It [Pg 14]might make her cough worse to go out now. Are there many people in this land?"

"Yes, a great many."

"Are there more going?"

"Yes, they are going all the time."

"Do people here in the city know about it?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't somebody tell me before mother got so sick? I just can't bear to see her suffer so, and we might be there now. I'm afraid it will be a long time before she's well enough to start. Oh, if I'd only known! I'd think somebody should have told me."

"Do folks have enough to eat there? Sometimes since mother's not been able to work much, we get so awful hungry."

"They have everything they want, and never get hungry."

"Everything they want, and never get hungry?"

"Yes."

"And is it cold there?"

"No."

"Do they have to pay rent?"

"No, for Jesus has paid for everything."

"Oh, oh! won't it be nice? How glad mother will be when I tell her, for it has been so hard for us to [Pg 15]get along this winter. The rent is due next Monday, and we have nothing to pay it with,

but if mother is just well enough to go, it won't make no difference. But the very best part of all, she won't be coughing any more!

"Oh!" half screamed Rosa, "I forgot to get off, and have gone a whole block past Lake Avenue. What would Mis' Gray say to me?"

Without another word she was gone, for already the car was beginning to move on. Scarcely realizing what she did, she ran after it for a short distance. With a great pang, she remembered that the girl had not told her the way to the beautiful land, where mother might go and never cough any more.

Half stunned by bewilderment and disappointment, and with her heart heavier than before, she delivered her package, purchased the steak, and in due time was again at the sufferer's bedside.



II.

ESTHER'S PERPLEXITY.

The day was gradually fading into darkness.

Esther Fairfax, with sadness upon her usually sunny face, was sitting before her cheery open fire, fruitlessly endeavoring to become interested in her newly-purchased book.

Her room was by no means elegantly furnished, but every article it contained, from the rugs upon the floor to the pictures upon the wall, reflected the refinement and culture of the fair young occupant.

Presently, closing her book and tossing it carelessly from her hand, she settled back upon her couch for good solid meditation, while tears gathered in her deep blue eyes, chasing each other in rapid succession down her flushed cheeks.

For some time she lived over the events of the afternoon, recalling minutely the details of the unusual conversation with the untaught but interesting child.

"Oh," she thought, "I shall never forget those words, 'How much is the fare? We're poor you know.' If only I knew where she lives, that I might go and see her and minister to the comforts of the dying mother! The hungry wistfulness of those eyes seems burned into my very soul.

"Father, I am so glad you have come," she said, hastily rising upon hearing the familiar footstep in the hall. "I have been waiting a long time for your return."

"Why, my child, you have been crying. What is it? Are you ill, or have you received an unwelcome message?"

"No, neither, father, but I am so troubled about a little girl I saw in the car this afternoon, and who disappeared almost magically."

"Come into my study and tell me all about it, Esther."

Although Dr. Fairfax was the pastor of one of the largest churches in the city, he always had time for his beloved and motherless daughter.

"When I was coming from down town this afternoon," she began, "a very small girl with a very large [Pg 18]package in her arms stepped aboard the car. Her face was so sweet and innocent that one would notice it even in a crowd, but overshadowed by an expression of care far too heavy for her baby years. Her eyes were large, dark and unusually lustrous, while her wavy brown hair fell about her face and neck in rich profusion. Her clothing was scant and old, but clean and very neatly mended. The whole appearance of the child was so pathetically irresistible that I went and sat down by her side, taking her cold little hand within my own.

"She talked freely, telling me that her name is Rosa Browning. As I now recall the conversation, I find that I know but little indeed of her actual circumstances, and nothing at all of the location of her home.

"She spoke most tenderly now and then of 'grandpa', and occasionally mentioned 'Mis' Gray', who, I imagine, is not specially noted for her amiability. But oh, father, when she would refer to her mother, it seemed that her heart was almost crushed with anxiety, and that her burden was greater than she could bear!"

With tears still flowing, Esther then told of Rosa's bewilderment concerning her mother's rumored moving, and of her own efforts to explain what this moving probably meant.

The strong man, accustomed as he was to the tales [Pg 19]of woe and misery among the poor and outcast, bowed his head and wept also. The pathos of the child's simple, direct questions impressed him quite as much as it had Esther.

"But how much is the fare? How much is the fare?" he repeated over and over.

"Truly you answered well, daughter. We have no fare to pay, no, none, for Jesus paid it all! But what a price—the life of the Son of the Most High God, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!"

For some minutes they remained in silence, lost in the thought of the price of redemption.

"It is unfathomable, father," at last Esther said softly, "and to think that His death was for even little Rosa, and the poor child knew nothing about it! I felt ashamed and speechless when she asked me why she had never been told before, having no reasonable answer whatever to give. I wish I could tell you with what earnestness she said, 'Are you real sure He paid the fare for everybody?' A fact so stupendous seemed quite beyond her power of comprehension."

"Yes, daughter, His death included the fare for her [Pg 20]as well as for you and for me. In every soul He sees a pearl of greatest price."

"But Rosa left before I could explain anything to her about the way of salvation. Perhaps she will find no one to tell her, and her mother is almost dead. Oh, that I knew where she lives! All she needs is some one to guide her, then perhaps she would lead her mother and grandpa, and even Mrs. Gray into the light of His love.

"Why is it, father, that so few Christians speak of Jesus to those whom they meet? They talk fluently of everything else, but the mentioning of His name seemingly paralyzes their tongues. This city is full of churches, with many thousands who profess to be the Lord's, yet Rosa in reality has never heard of Him. Every day of her life, as she goes upon the street, or is in a car, she comes into contact with some one who might lead her precious little soul to Christ. Just one moment of conversation would help her so, and is it possible that there is none who cares? Why is it? How can those who know Him truly be so utterly indifferent?"

"My child, you ask me what I cannot answer. I spend many hours of prayer and study upon every sermon I preach, and seek to deliver it in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then after having cast myself utterly upon Him, it is simply crushing to know that at [Pg 21]times the message falls upon deaf ears. The tide of worldliness sweeping over the churches is at the root of the whole matter. Many to whom I preach are saved, but oh, so few *surrendered*! They want just enough of Christ to help them in times of trouble, to make sure of heaven being their ultimate goal, and just as much of this world as they can possibly carry along. It is their ambition to be His for eternity, but not for time. Oh, that they might know the unspeakable joy of a consecrated life, and of leading souls to Him! After once experiencing it, the charms of this world sink into utter insignificance, while the realities of the next become more and more certain.

"The weight of my responsibility well nigh crushes me at times, for the Lord knows that I want to lead His people aright. How I yearn for absolute surrender upon the part of myself and of my church! When I remember Christ's words, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,' it makes me fear that many, indeed, of this generation shall say in vain at that day, Lord, Lord! It is a fearful thing for those who profess to know Him, to go up into His presence, leaving behind some still groping in darkness because of their unfaithfulness. If it is possible now for the Saviour ever to be unhappy, surely lukewarm Christians must pain Him the most."

"Father, I want to find Rosa. If I had been more [Pg 22]eager for her soul and for the glory of the Lord, I should have left the car and followed her. How can I begin the search? It seems so utterly impossible, yet I must."

"My darling, it would be folly for you to try to find this child, but let us ask God to send her to us. He can direct in some way. He sees her this very moment, and sees us as well."

A new and radiant light flooded Esther's face with joy, as they arose from their knees.

"I am sure He will hear us, father, dear," she said, "for it was by no mere chance I saw her today. The Lord's directing hand was in it. He will, I know, forgive my unfaithfulness and open another opportunity.

"Let us sing 'The Home of the Soul', father. How mother loved that song, when she knew that soon she would behold the beauties of the place!"

The two voices, the one a sweet soprano, the other a fine tenor, blended in the old-time hymn:

"I will sing you a song of that beautiful land,The far away home of the soul,Where no storms ever beat on that glittering strand,While the years of eternity roll."

At the conclusion of the song, Esther kissed her father and quietly left the room.



III.

ROSA'S MOTHER MOVES.

"Miss Browning, here's your steak I broiled for you and some toast and tea. I fixed some fer Rosa, too you're so mighty queer, I knew you wouldn't eat unless she had some. I can't afford to buy her any more, and there ain't many that'd done it this time. I have to work awful hard fer all I git."

"Thank you, Mrs. Gray, you are very kind, but," she added softly, lest Rosa who had run in to speak to grandpa might hear, "if only I knew what would become of her! Oh, my poor child! how can I bear to leave her, and what will her future be?"

The moans of the poor, tortured mother, whose life was fast ebbing away, were most piteous.

[Pg 24]"Now, Mis' Browning, don't take on so; chirk up a bit! She's plenty old enough to work and make her own livin'. Of course you couldn't expect me to say I'd keep her. Land sakes! Grandpa's all I can manage now, and he's gittin' worse and more tryin' every day. Why, jest this mornin' when I wuz that busy I didn't know what to do a-finishin' up that sewin', what should he do but stumble ag'in the coal pail and upset the whole thing right on the floor, and jest after I'd scrubbed, too! Then I thought I'd git rid of him a few minutes by sendin' him to the grocery. Of

course I never trust him with a cent of money. They know him at the corner grocery, so it's all right; but it all comes of my credit a-bein' so good, that's the reason. Well, I told him it wuz not necessary fer him to be gone but fifteen minutes, but when he wuz gone twenty, I had to put my work down and go after him. I'd better have gone in the first place. That's always the way when I trust him fer anything, it jest makes it that much harder fer me in the end. I had to go clean down the stairs, and in some way twisted my ankle, so I ain't got over it yet; then I saw him a-comin', but that slow, it made me real provoked. If he'd jest a-hurried up a little, it would have saved me all that trouble. He said he wuz tired, but I think I wuz the one to be tired, a-hurryin' down them steps so, and a-gittin' hurt, too.

[Pg 25]"Land sakes, Mis' Browning, I'd think you could see I have my hands more'n full now, though I don't wonder you would like to have Rosa brought up by me. I could train her mighty well, so as she'd know how to do somethin'. She's old enough to work, and I'll keep an eye on her and correct her whenever she needs it, and that'll be often. I'd think you'd ought to be satisfied with that. There ain't many that'd take sech an interest in a homeless little waif, I can tell you.

"You eat your supper now, and I'll tell Rosa to come home. That's one thing she'll have to quit, a-wastin' so much time. What she sees in grandpa is more'n I can tell, fer he ain't got a bit of sense. Often in the night he wakes me up a-hollerin' and a-carryin' on a-thinkin' he's a boy ag'in. There's not many as patient as I am, or they wouldn't put up with it."

Every word was a knife thrust through the sensitive, bleeding heart of the distracted mother.

"Oh," she thought, "that some one in this great, crowded city might love my darling, and that she need not fall into the hands of this woman!"

"Mrs. Gray," she asked excitedly, and with an effort controlling the great dry sobs which were choking her, "won't you promise me one thing? Won't you keep Rosa at least till spring? What can my baby do without [Pg 26]a home and without a mother, especially when the weather is so bitterly cold? The mere thought of such a possibility drives me insane with fear and grief. She can run errands for you, and grandpa loves her so. Do not deny me, for I am almost dead!"

Mrs. Gray half staggered backward, for never before had she heard Mrs. Browning speak with such intensity. The dark eyes riveted upon her conquered even this unfeeling heart, and before realizing the import of her words, granted the request. "But," she added in the same breath, "there ain't many that'd do it, I can tell you that."

"And be gentle with her, Mrs. Gray. She is so affectionate, she will miss her mother and the love I have always bestowed upon her."

Thinking that other promises still more difficult to fulfill might be exacted, Mrs. Gray hastily left the room.

"Thank God," the mother murmured falling back upon her pillow, "my baby will have food and shelter at least till spring, but how she will miss the love!"

The hot tears began coursing down the flushed cheeks, causing Rosa to give a cry of alarm as she stepped up to the bedside.

"Mother dear, do you feel worse? Why do you cry?"

[Pg 27]"My darling, mother is tired now and cannot talk. Pull the little table up by the bed, then if I can eat some supper, we shall talk afterward. There is something I want to tell you."

Mechanically she obeyed, weighted beneath the feeling that something dreadful was about to happen. The trembling of the tiny hands and twitching of the delicate face betrayed a heart suffering which a child of her tender years should never know.

The odor of the steak, while being broiled, had given Rosa an appetite, for her dinner had consisted only of boiled potatoes. Now, however, that mother apparently did not relish her supper, it seemed that every mouthful would choke her.

With a feeling of relief, the supper things at last were cleared away, and Rosa sat down by the sufferer, taking her hot thin hand within her own.

"You need not talk, mother, if you do not feel like it, but I do so want to know about the moving, and you won't go without me, will you? But oh, I have such good news, I must tell you the very first thing! Mebbe it will change your plans and make it easier to know what to do.

"I saw a lovely lady today, and she told me about a beautiful land some place, where folks never cough no more, and they don't have to pay rent, and they have [Pg 28]all they want to eat. And she said, too, that it don't cost nothing to go, nor after you get there, 'cause Jesus paid all the fare a long time ago. I wish I knew where to find Jesus, so He could explain all about it. I had to leave the car before the lady could tell me the way. I think He must be so good to pay the fare for everybody. There's no mistake, 'cause she said something about God so loving the world. I don't know what she meant, but it was so pretty. I know I'd love Jesus so, if I could only find Him, and He'd tell us how to go, I'm sure He would.

"Oh, mother, why do you cry so much? Don't feel so, for I'll try my very best to find out the way, then we'll both go. It will be so nice, won't it, for you not to have a cough no more? And mebbe we can manage to get off before the rent is due again."

The anxious little nurse, old beyond her years, tenderly kissed the pallid brow, repeating soothingly the assurance that in some way she would find out how to reach this beautiful land.

"O God," at last the invalid faltered after several minutes of silence, "forgive me and take me to that beautiful land, for Jesus' sake, and care for my darling!

"Rosa dear, my breath is growing very short, but I must tell you something. You are too young to know [Pg 29]what it all means now, but try to remember, and sometime you will understand.

"Just ten years ago today I was married to your father, Harold Browning; and you are so like him, precious.

"I was left an orphan at the age of fourteen, and from that time till the day of marriage, made my living by clerking in a down-town store. Your father, too, was alone in the world, and how we loved each other!

"We rented a small furnished flat, which to me was a paradise. Your father was a bookkeeper on a comfortable salary, and for a time all went well. At the end of the second year you were born, and then our joy knew no bounds. Every evening while holding you in his arms, we would plan for the future, you being the center of everything. There was not a shadow over our lives, till one

morning he was not able to go to work. In a few hours he became so very ill that in great alarm I summoned the doctor. Then followed weeks of suspense, the days being divided between hope and fear, till at last all thought of his recovery was given up. My anguish was too deep for tears. I went around as one stunned, not knowing at times what I was about. Your dear father tried to comfort me, pointing me to Jesus whom he loved intensely, but who I said was cruel to allow [Pg 30]our little home nest thus ruthlessly to be broken up.

"What happened the last days of his life to me is a blank, for I myself was very ill. When I recovered and paid all the bills, there was not one cent left for us. I could hold the flat no longer, so moved here on Burton street, making our living, as you know, darling, by the day's work. It has been very hard, for often I have felt unable to be out of bed; but then I could not let my Rosa suffer."

The intervals when the poor heartbroken woman had to stop to regain her breath, were growing more frequent.

"But, dearest," she continued, and in her earnestness she raised herself partly up, "the worst of all has been that I have tried to carry the burden alone. Your father told me that I must be brave for your sake, and that Jesus would help me; but I would not let Him.

"Last night and today I have been praying much, and now, thank God, it is all right!"

Rosa wondered at the expression of joy flooding her mother's face, immediately followed by one of deepest grief.

"Bend closer, darling, my voice is becoming so weak that you cannot hear! I am so sorry that I did not do as your father said, and have never taught you [Pg 31]of Jesus, and now it is—too late!—I'm glad—the lady—told you.—Yes,—He paid—the fare!—I'm—going—to move—now—to that—beautiful land!"

"Oh, mother," sobbed Rosa, beginning to realize a little of the import of her words, "please, oh, please don't leave me! What could I ever do without you? Nobody loves me but you and grandpa, and I just can't stand it, if you go away."

With her last atom of strength, the dying mother kissed her child, whispering just so that Rosa could hear:

"Find someone—to tell you—the way,—and come—to that—beautiful—land—where you will—find Jesus—and mother!"

So calmly did she fall back upon her pillow that Rosa, though awe-struck, thought she was sleeping. Still clasping the thin hand, she noticed the chill. Cautiously, lest she might disturb the sleeper, she slipped off her little flannel skirt, the last article made by her mother, and wrapped the cold hands within its folds. The scant coverings she also tucked up more closely and put their last bit of coal upon the fire.

Till midnight she sat by the bed, wondering why mother was so very still, and why she was growing so cold. At last, being able to endure the suspense [Pg 32]no longer, stepping across the hall, she called for Mrs. Gray.

"Land sakes, child, why ain't you in bed this time of night?"

"Please, Mis' Gray, I'd like to borrow a comfort, 'cause mother's so awful cold, and I can't get her warm."

"Well, when a body's as accommodatin' as I am, I 'spose they must expect to be bothered any time of day or night, too. I'll git up and see what your ma wants. Glad of one thing, she ain't kept me awake by her coughin' tonight, anyway; but it comes from me fixin' her a decent supper, I reckon."

Mrs. Gray stepped to the door of Mrs. Browning's room, but something impelled her to stop. A fear seized her, while involuntarily she clutched Rosa's trembling hand.

There was no light in the room, save that which shone from across the hall, the faint rays falling directly over the motionless form upon the bed.

"Mis' Browning," she cautiously asked, "do you want anything?"

"Mother doesn't hear, Mis' Gray," said Rosa sobbing violently and throwing herself within the cold arms, kissing over and over the lips hitherto so responsive to her own.

[Pg 33]"Mother dear, don't you hear me? Oh, wake up, please do! I want you so. I don't know the way, and will get lost to go alone."

"Rosa," said Mrs. Gray almost gently, "git up and go and stay with grandpa till I tell you to come in here, and don't you come before. I'll have to go down them steps ag'in fer an undertaker."

"What is an undertaker, Mis' Gray, and what do they do? Will they take mother to the beautiful land?"

"Didn't you hear me tell you to go in and stay with grandpa? So go right this minute, and ask no more questions. You do beat all fer askin' questions, anyhow. You might as well learn now as any time to mind, since I have to keep you till spring. I ain't the woman to go back on my word, but there ain't many but what would, a-promisin' under the circumstances."

The little heart was nearly crushed with a feeling of perplexity and of indescribable dread, but, after all, there was some comfort in being alone with grandpa.

Stealing softly into his room, she found him sitting by the stove; and climbing up into his lap, pillowing her tired head upon his shoulder, the two lonely children, soothing each other, were soon fast asleep.



IV.

LIFE WITH MRS. GRAY.

The events of the next few days were like a troubled dream to Rosa, as she in vain endeavored to comprehend the meaning of all the mysterious things going on about her. Only once was she allowed to look upon the silent sleeper. That was just before the arrival of the great black carriage, which, she was sure, would take her mother to the beautiful land.

"Rosa ain't goin' to the burial, I can tell you that," announced Mrs. Gray to a neighbor, "or she'd be a-hollerin' in her sleep all winter. I've been broke of my rest so much that I ain't goin' to be bothered with her any more'n I can help from now on. I didn't promise to keep her only till spring, but I can make her run errands and sich, so it won't cost me a great sight. I [Pg 35]can't afford it no other way, and Mis' Browning was unreasonable, anyhow, to ask it of me."

Rosa and grandpa stood hand in hand, watching the small procession until it disappeared around the corner.

"Grandpa," queried Rosa in a tearful voice, "do you know where that beautiful land is where folks never cough no more, and where they don't have to pay rent? That's where mother's going, and she told me to find out the way, so I could go too."

"Pears like I'd ought to know, child, fer that's where Tom went. I can't think much somehow, but, Rosa," he added tenderly, drawing her up closer to his side, "I don't want you to go and leave me, fer I'm so lonesome. Sary's a good woman, yes, a very good woman, but it seems like I need you, too, dearie."

"Grandpa, if we'd start out together, don't you think we could find it? Folks have all they want to eat there, and I'm hungry now."

"Why, yes, yes, mebbe we could! Some way I'm gittin' homesick. I don't like it here in the city, and it seems like I used to know more about that land than I do now. Since poor Tom got killed, I can't remember no how.

"Sometimes in the night I git that happy, but if I make a little noise, Sary wakes me up, 'cause it bothers [Pg 36]her, then that spoils it all. I think I'm back in the country ag'in, and the church bell is a-ringin' of a Sunday mornin'. Tom's mother and me start out from the little cottage, and I'm a-carryin' Tom. We walk down the cool grassy lane with the brook a-runnin' on one side, and the trees is a-wavin' in the soft breeze, and the birds is a-singin', and Tom's mother stops to pick

some wild roses. And the little white meetin' house with the steeple a-p'intin' straight up. My Rosa, I wish you could see it, and with vines a-growin' all over it! I can 'most git it, then it slips away ag'in. If I could jest be inside of that meetin' house once more, it would all come straight, I know, fer there they used to talk and sing about that land and Jesus."

"Yes, grandpa, you know it was Jesus that paid the fare. Wasn't He kind to do that? 'cause if He hadn't poor folks couldn't go."

"Yes, mighty kind, mighty kind!

"Rosa," after a pause, "come real close," and the faded eyes sparkled with a new thought; "I want to whisper somethin' so nobody'll hear. The very first day Sary's away, let's start out, and mebber we can find some one to tell us how to go. Will you, child?"

"Oh, yes, grandpa, good! then we'll find mother."

In her delight she clapped her hands for very joy.

"Sh! sh! child, Sary might hear, and that would [Pg 37]spoil it all, though of course Sary's a good woman, yes, a very good woman. You won't tell, will you?"

"No, no, grandpa, this'll be our secret. I'm just sure there must be lots of folks that can tell us, for the fare is paid for everybody, and they're going all the time. But I do wish we could find that pretty lady again I saw on the car."

"Yes, dearie, I wish so too, but I think we'll find it anyhow. I'm a-gittin' so very homesick, we jest must."

"Sing about that land, won't you, grandpa?"

"All right, you git the fiddle. That's the only song I can remember. They used to sing it in the little white meetin' house with the steeple a-p'intin' straight up. Wish I could remember more, but I can't."

In a quavery voice he sang many times over the grand old hymn:

"I will sing you a song of that beautiful land,
The far away home of the soul,
Where no storms ever beat on that glittering strand,
While the years of eternity roll.

Oh, that home of the soul in my visions and dreams,
Its bright, jasper walls I can see,
Till I fancy but thinly the vail intervenes
Between that fair city and me!

That unchangeable home is for you and for me,

[Pg 38]

Where Jesus of Nazareth stands;
The King of all kingdoms forever is He,
And He holdeth our crowns in His hands.

Oh, how sweet it will be in that beautiful land,
So free from all sorrow and pain,
With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands,
To meet one another again!"

"That must be the place, grandpa, for it says Jesus is there, and that we'll meet one another again."

"Yes, yes, child, it's the place, I'm mighty sure of that, and I'm so glad we're a-goin' to find it. I'll like it so much better than the city. I wonder I ain't gone before."

The two sang and talked till the twilight began to fall, then they heard Mrs. Gray shuffling up the stairs.

"Now don't fergit and tell, Rosa," hurriedly whispered grandpa.

"Oh, no indeed, and we'll go the very first chance we have. Won't mother be glad to see us?"

"Land sakes, Rosa, you look and act a heap like you'd jest lost your ma. I heard that fiddle and you a-singin' with grandpa long before I got up the steps. But it is real lucky fer you, though, that I'll have you to manage till spring. You'll learn how to do somethin' a-stayin' here with me, or I'll miss my guess.

[Pg 39]"Why ain't you got a brisker fire started up fer supper? Do it right this minute. It'll be somethin' new fer you to have a cooked meal every day, and sometimes two or three of them. But you'll have to earn them first, or eat by yourself, and jest what you can git.

"I ain't a-goin' to keep you fer nothin'. Hurry up now, fer I'm cold, and my ankle's 'most a-killin' me. Father'd ought to be shook yet, fer causin' me so much trouble. No tellin' how much longer it'll pain me, and I shouldn't wonder if it'd lay me up."

Thus rudely was Rosa's reverie broken in upon, bringing her face to face with her present dingy surroundings in general, and with Mrs. Gray in particular. Her first impulse was to run home, then in agony she remembered that her mother was not there.

Patiently she worked away till the fire was started. Mrs. Gray's bulky form in the meantime was swinging energetically back and forth in the one rocking chair of her two-room apartment, while her voluble tongue wagged mercilessly on.

"You can cook them potatoes and fry some mush and make me a cup of tea. You and father can drink water; tea ain't good fer children nohow, ha, ha!

"Ugh, this fire feels good! I'm glad I ain't where your ma is tonight."

[Pg 40]"Why, Mis' Gray," half sobbed Rosa, "didn't mother go to the beautiful land?"

"You be still and git supper, and don't ask me no questions!"

"There, there, dearie, don't cry! Of course your ma went there." It was grandpa who spoke.

"A heap you know about it, father, and I jest want you to keep still, too!

"Look out there! Don't you spatter no grease a-fryin' that mush, or you'll wish you hadn't. I believe in the good old-fashioned rod, and there's one stuck up over that door, handy like. See it?"

To her great dismay, looking in the direction indicated, Rosa beheld a cruel whip, the first one ever intended for her. Her little frame shook so violently from fear that grandpa could endure it no longer.

"Tut, tut, Sary; Rosa ain't the child to need no whippin', and don't skeer the poor lamb so.

"Never mind, dearie," reaching out for her a withered hand, "Sary don't mean it; Sary's a good woman, yes, a very good woman."

"Father, I want you to remember right now that you ain't to put no say in when I correct her. There ain't but one boss here, and that's me, so there! Do you understand? I 'spose not, though, fer you ain't got no sense. You're tryin' enough, goodness knows, [Pg 41]that there ain't many but what'd use the rod on you."

So blinded by tears that she could not see what she was doing, by accident Rosa dropped a piece of the fried mush upon the floor.

"There!" shrieked Mrs. Gray, "what did I tell you? I'm a-goin' to lick you this very minute, now you jest see. I guess you'll learn to mind after I've done it a few times."

"Grandpa!" and with a bound Rosa jumped into the old man's outstretched arms, while tears chased each other in quick succession down his faded cheeks.

Making an effort to arise hastily from her chair, Mrs. Gray with a sharp cry of pain, suddenly sank backward again.

"Oh, my ankle's plum give out—I can't take one step! But you never mind, I'll lick you some other time, and you needn't fergit it neither. Git right down and clean up that mush, and fix some hot water fer me to put my foot in."

Seeing the helpless condition of the tyrant, Rosa waited long enough before obeying to kiss grandpa, and for him to whisper encouragingly:

"Never mind, dearie; we'll go the very first chance we have, and if we can't do no better, we'll run off."



"There!" shrieked Mrs. Gray, "what did I tell you?"
[Page 44.]

With some degree of composure, Rosa performed her tasks, for evidently, judging from the groans of [Pg 44]the patient, the promised "lickin'" would be indefinitely postponed.

While eating supper, Mrs. Gray divided her attentions about equally between the two helpless victims of her wrath. The sprained ankle was entirely due to the fact that grandpa was gone twenty minutes instead of fifteen, and that she, obliging woman that she was, took it upon herself to make all the arrangements for Mrs. Browning, instead of looking after her own welfare. Not many could be found who would do half as much for others as she.

The grease from that mush would stay in the floor all winter, seriously injuring her reputation of being the best housekeeper in the thickly populated building. She never could endure dirt and disorder, though poverty-stricken from the day she married Tom Gray.

On the whole, Rosa was so thoroughly miserable that very little supper could she eat. The thought that she and grandpa would soon find the beautiful land and mother, was all that gave her even the slightest ray of hope. "But," she added mentally, "I am sure mother would tell me to stay and take care of Mis' Gray till she can walk again. She always did do more talking than anything else, mother said so, mebbe she won't whip me."

The evening was long and gloomy, but Rosa was [Pg 45]kept busily employed, carrying out the peremptory commands of the cripple. She bathed and tenderly rubbed the offending ankle till her arm ached cruelly.

At last, with a sigh of relief, wrapping herself up in a blanket and lying down upon the floor, she dreamed till morning of mother, the beautiful land, and of Jesus who paid the fare.

For three weeks Mrs. Gray was unable to take a step except by using a crutch, the pain at times being so severe that sewing was out of the question.

Her slender savings not being sufficient to meet the emergency of the case, Rosa in her spare moments was obliged to run errands, tend babies while the mothers were out working, or to do anything else chancing to come her way.

Her allowance of food often was meager, though never once did she complain. Every day she was growing more thin and pale, her eyes more large and lustrous, while her heart was almost breaking.

Night after night the swollen ankle had to be gently rubbed, or Mrs. Gray could not sleep. No word of praise ever escaped the cruel lips, but fretting, scolding, and threats of the much talked of "lickin'" for that grease spot upon the floor were the only reward the weary little worker ever received.

There was one, however, though his mind was badly [Pg 46]shattered, who saw and understood, causing the feeble old man to suffer quite as intensely as did the child.

They could snatch opportunities only now and then for a word, fearing that the ever-vigilant Mrs. Gray might discover their cherished secret.

"Be brave, dearie," grandpa would sometimes whisper, "the very first chance, you know!" Then Rosa's pensive face would light up with a smile angelic, reflecting some of the very beauty itself of the land of which they were so earnestly thinking.

One Thursday afternoon, just as Mrs. Gray was beginning to walk again, the postman stopped with a letter, a rare occurrence.

"Land sakes, who can it be from?" she exclaimed, scrutinizing the envelope quite long enough to have read the letter through.

"I'd like to awful well," at last she soliloquized, "but don't 'spose it'd be safe to leave grandpa and Rosa here alone. No tellin' what they'd be up to. There ain't many that'd be as self-sacrificin' as I am, and keep an old man that ain't got a drop of your own blood, then take in as good as a street waif, too. If it wuzn't fer them, I'd do it, I jest would!"

Rosa's curiosity was aroused, but experience had taught her the futility of asking questions.

"Rosa," commanded the speaker, "bring me that tin can up there on the shelf.

[Pg 47]"I guess I could manage the streetcar fare," she announced a few minutes later, counting over several times Rosa's earnings in pennies, nickels and dimes.

"My old neighbor over on the south side wants me to come tomorrow and stay till Monday. Bein' that I've had it so awful hard, I jest guess I'll do it, and you can git along the best way you can. Let me see: I'll go tomorrow afternoon, and be gone all day Saturday and Sunday and till late Monday afternoon. I'll leave you fifteen cents apiece to live on, and I guess you won't starve."

Instinctively grandpa and Rosa cast a glance at each other. At last their opportunity had come, and a better one by far than for which they had dared to hope!

The time intervening between the reception of the letter and her departure, Mrs. Gray spent mostly in giving directions to her two charges, as she delighted to call them.

After having gone down the first flight of stairs, she called back:

"Rosa, I'll lick you sure if you git another speck of grease on that there floor, while I'm gone."

But Rosa heeded not. Tomorrow she and grandpa would start for the beautiful land and mother, for Jesus had paid all the fare.



V.

THE WAY SOUGHT.

Early the next morning Rosa and grandpa were up, eagerly preparing for the events of the day, their every motion evidencing a subdued excitement, while joy beamed from their eyes.

"I'm going to make you some tea, grandpa, 'cause it's cold, and I think you'll feel better to drink it. Mis' Gray told me I shouldn't touch it, but since we're going away, I guess it won't make no difference. We may have to travel a good ways, you know. Mother used to drink tea, when we could afford it, before starting out to work all day. My, ain't I glad we're going to find mother! And she won't be coughing no more. I want to see her so bad. Of course Mis' Gray has been good to give me a home, but I'd rather be with mother. She's different some way, and I love her so. It seems so long since she went away."

[Pg 49]"Thank you, dearie, fer this tea; it's real bracin' like, and I can't remember when I've had none before Tom used to git it fer me, and anything else I wanted.

"Yes, I'm mighty glad we're a-goin', mighty glad, fer I'm a-gittin' homesicker all the time. I think we'll find Tom, too, and Tom's mother. There's a lot I want to tell 'em. Sary's so busy, she don't have no time to talk to me.

"Last night I dreamed ag'in that I wuz in the little white meetin' house with the steeple a-pintin' straight up. The green vines a-wavin' in the breeze wuz a-growin' all over it, and the roses smelled so pretty. And the man wuz a-readin' out of the Book, Rosa. Wish I could read, then I'd know it fer myself."

"What was he reading about, grandpa?"

"Dunno as I can tell you, child, only somethin' about a river, and a tree by it, and fruit, and the folks don't git sick no more, and—well, I can't tell you, Rosa, but hurry up, let's start! When we git there, we'll know all about it then."

"Here, grandpa, put this bread in your pocket, please. P'rhaps we'll need it."

"I'll take it fer you, Rosa, if you say so, but I don't think we'll need it. 'Pears like the man said somethin' about their not gittin' hungry no more, nor thirsty."

[Pg 50]"But then mebbe we'll want it on the way."

"All right, all right, Rosa, but are you 'most ready? Seems like I can't wait."

"Yes, I'm ready now, but I'm so 'fraid you'll be cold, grandpa, dear."

"No, no, child, we'll soon git there."

The two children trudged down the three long flights of steps, the younger leading the older lest he should trip and fall.

The morning was dreary, with a cold wind blowing and with snow flakes scurrying through the air. Both being insufficiently clad, they were shivering before having gone a block.

"'Tis mighty cold, ain't it, dearie? I had no idee about it; but then we won't mind, jest so we git there."

"Yes, grandpa, but I hope it won't take us long, for the wind blows so awful hard. It used to make mother cough to be out in a wind like this.

"The big black carriage that came after her, went 'round this corner, so we'll go this way too. I'm sure nobody on Burton street knows the way anyhow. I'd think they would, though, when the fare's all paid; but p'rhaps they've never been told about it.

"When we see a pretty lady dressed fine, we'll ask her, for I guess she'd know; but then it's for poor folks, too.

[Pg 51]"I wonder why nobody ever told me about Jesus before? I'll be so glad when I see Him."

Tenderly clasping each other by the hand, they walked for blocks, meeting hundreds of people, though none of them appealed to Rosa's fancy. She was looking for a beautiful girl with blue eyes and a blue suit, who would look down upon her with a smile. A feeling of uncertainty was beginning to depress her, but to grandpa she continued to talk hopefully.

At last realizing that he was becoming very tired, she determined to wait no longer before inquiring the way. Singling out of the jostling crowd a well-dressed woman with a fur cloak, which Rosa thought looked so warm, she stepped up to her, and said:

"Please, ma'am, grandpa and me want to go to the beautiful land where folks don't cough no more. Mother's gone, and Jesus paid all the fare, and it don't cost nothing to live there, neither. Won't you please tell us the way?"

"What a very singular question!" was the unfeeling reply, the haughty face relaxing not at all as the woman passed on.

"I think she didn't understand, grandpa," said the disappointed child, "but I'll try again. There's a lady dressed in blue. I'm pretty sure she'll know."

In a tremulous voice the question was repeated.

[Pg 52]"Why, you queer little girl! Are you talking about heaven?"

"I don't know, ma'am, only it's where Jesus has paid the fare, and where there ain't no rent days to come 'round."

"Really, I scarcely know what to say, only you and this poor old man ought not to be out on this cold day."

"We thought we'd soon be there, ma'am, but 'tis dreadful cold," she replied, her slight frame shivering violently from head to foot.

"Can't you tell us? We want to go so awful bad. I should think you could, since it's for everybody."

"It is too cold and crowded to stand here and talk, child. Do you go to Sunday school?"

"No, ma'am; what is Sunday school?"

"You poor little heathen! Don't you know what Sunday schools are? They have them in all the churches. Find one and go tomorrow. They will tell you what you want better than I can.

"Take this quarter and get something to eat, then go back home. You will meet no one on the street to help you."

Having thus somewhat eased her conscience, this church-member of many years went on to complete her shopping. However, things did not go well the [Pg 53]rest of the day. The wan face, the sad brown eyes and the pathetic earnestness of the little questioner were constantly before her.

Stopping to see the church treasurer on her way home, she left a check for fifty dollars to be used in city mission work, feeling confident that at last her responsibility in the case was at an end.

It was nearing the noon hour, and Rosa was hungry.

"I think instead of eating that dry bread in your pocket, grandpa, that we'll get some warm sandwiches. You wait: I can get them in here, 'cause I was in one time before with mother."

Very soon she returned, bringing with her their feast.

"Let's go down this alley and sit on that box. I guess the p'licemen won't care."

"All right, dearie, but it's a mighty long ways to the beautiful land, ain't it? I thought we'd surely be there by now, and I'm gittin' so tired and cold. I think if Tom knew we'd started, he'd come and meet us."

While they were eating, Rosa was frightened to hear suddenly the abrupt question in a gruff voice, "What are you doing here?" and before her terrified eyes loomed a great policeman.

[Pg 54]She, like most children of her class, feared instinctively these city protectors, and would have run, had it have not been for grandpa.

"Oh," she replied, with as much dignity and composure as possible, "we are going to the beautiful land, and are just eating our sandwiches. It don't cost nothing to go, 'cause God so loved the world and Jesus paid all the fare. Mother's gone, and folks don't cough no more there. You don't have to pay rent, and can have everything you want, too."

So astonished was the policeman at this unexpected reply that he forgot to order them away.

"Well, I never!" at last he ejaculated, being unable to think of anything more appropriate for the occasion. "But let me tell you, little girl, you and that old man want to turn in wherever you came from before dark, or you'll be more likely to go to the police station than to this beautiful land you're talking about."

So saying, he started off upon his beat.

The mere thought of spending the night at the police station so thoroughly terrorized Rosa that her heart for the instant almost stood still.

Billy Bruce, the boy who lived next door to Mrs. Gray, had told her blood-curdling tales concerning his oft-repeated experiences in being locked up for the [Pg 55]night, and, moreover, according to his criterion, he was always innocent of any misdemeanor.

"But the worst part of all," he had confided, "is a goin' before the judge. You know the judge is the man what's made to git folks into trouble."

What should she do? Her childish eyes could see that grandpa was about given out, but the mere thought of returning to Burton street filled her with a feeling akin to terror.

"But," she argued, "Mis' Gray won't be home till Monday, and mebbe it's too far to the beautiful land that we can't get there today, anyhow. And I know mother'd feel awful if we'd get put in the p'lice station.

"Say, grandpa," she suddenly inquired, "why didn't we ask that p'liceman the way? They're on purpose to tell folks how to go. I wish we had, but then I'm afraid to speak to another."

"I don't know, child, but I wish we wuz there. I'm so cold and tired, and I want Tom."

"I'll tell you, grandpa, let's go back and get warm and rested. You know there is some of that bushel of coal left Mis' Gray got the other day. Then tomorrow we can try once more. The lady said something about church and Sunday school, but I don't know what she meant. Mebbe we can find some [Pg 56]yet to tell us, when it's for everybody. I'd think we could."

"Jest as you say, dearie, jest as you say, but it 'pears like we must find it, 'cause I'm so homesick."

Slowly they began retracing their steps, the old man leaning heavily with one hand upon the stick which served as a cane, and with the other clasping Rosa's.

Turning a corner, they suddenly came face to face with a well-dressed gentleman who, Rosa thought, could certainly tell them.

"Oh, say, mister," she said running up to his side, "won't you please—"

"No, I won't, you little beggar, I have nothing for you."

For the instant she was so surprised and indignant, that she could not answer, but, collecting herself, shouted after him:

"We ain't either beggars, and I don't want no money. I just want to know the way to the beautiful land."

But the man was lost in the crowd, and the weary, disappointed pilgrims started on.

So frequently did they have to turn aside into some alley or secluded spot for grandpa to rest that Rosa became alarmed. What if night should overtake them, bringing to pass the policeman's direful prediction?

[Pg 57]She was so tired and cold, and her heart so heavy from repeated disappointments, that the tears began rolling down her pale cheeks.

"What is it, my little girl?" unexpectedly some one gently asked.

In unutterable surprise, she looked up into the face of another policeman who was smiling kindly upon her.

Many a warm heart beats beneath the policeman's star, and Rosa's evident sorrow had aroused the sincere sympathy of this one.

"You and the old man step up here out of the wind by this building, and tell me your trouble. Are you lost?"

"No, sir, we ain't lost, but just can't find the way."

"Not lost, but can't find the way? How is it? I don't understand. Maybe I can help you, if you will explain."

At this Rosa broke into uncontrollable sobs, and for several minutes could not answer.

At last, with many a pause, the whole story was told.

"And oh," she added, with all the earnestness of which her intense nature was capable, "can you really tell us? Please, oh, please do, for I can't stand it any longer without mother, and she's looking for me, 'cause Jesus paid the fare. I just must go!"

[Pg 58]



Rosa broke into uncontrollable sobs. [Page 60.]

[Pg 60]"Ah, sweet baby," he faltered, his massive frame shaking with emotion, "I've a mother in the beautiful land looking for me, too!

"Long years ago I promised to meet her there, but, no, I've never found the way. I cannot tell you."

"If the way's so hard to find, how do folks get there? And lots of them are going, for the lady said so. I do wish mother'd come back for grandpa and me"; and again the child broke into sobs.

"Don't cry any more, little one. They say the way is easy to find. Let me think a minute; maybe I can help you after all. There's a big church on the corner there, and I know the pastor loves poor people. If you should go there tomorrow, he would tell you the way, I know.

"Now cheer up, and get back to your home as soon as possible. It will be getting dark presently, and you will half freeze. I will walk down to the corner with you, and point out the church."

Rosa's hopes were beginning to rise once more, but upon beholding the massive stone structure indicated by the policeman, she felt less sanguine.

"Are you real sure, mister, we could find the way if we'd go in there?" at length she said.

"Yes, I know it, for the pastor has wanted many times to teach me the way, and I wouldn't let him."

[Pg 61]Rosa had no idea who or what the pastor might be, and forgot to inquire, because of her unutterable surprise.

It was simply unthinkable that any one could deliberately refuse the information which she and grandpa so earnestly coveted.

"Mister p'liceman, why didn't you want to know the way?" she gasped, impulsively grasping his big, brawny hand. "Wouldn't you like to know now?"

"Yes, little one, I would, and by God's help I will. But come, you must be gone! It is almost dark. I'll watch for you in the morning, and take you to the door. Be sure not to disappoint me. Goodbye!"

That evening in the quiet of his room a wonderful thing happened.

Tucked away in the bottom of his trunk was a Bible, given to him years before by his mother, when he was but a mere lad. This he brought forth, and till a late hour poured over its precious contents. Then falling upon his knees, this prodigal of many years found in Jesus the true way to the beautiful land. He Himself said that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. And an unspeakable peace filled his soul.

The last half mile of their walk seemed almost interminable both to Rosa and grandpa.

As the darkness began to gather, every shadow to [Pg 62]her excited imagination was transformed into a policeman coming to lock them up.

After the trying experiences of the day, it was a relief to be back once more in the dingy rooms which they had expected never to see again.

Rosa soon had a fire feebly burning in the little stove, then prepared a scanty supper, offset by another cup of tea for grandpa.

The shabby couch she pulled up by the stove for him, and did all within her power to make him warm and comfortable.

Sitting by his side and watching him solicitously, she was beginning to fear that he might not be able for the journey tomorrow, for without a doubt he was much exhausted. At last the tears began rolling down his face and fell upon her hand.

"Oh, grandpa, what is it?" she asked, the tears coming to her own eyes. "You ain't sick, are you?"

"No, no, dearie, but mighty dis'p'inted. I thought we'd be there tonight sure, and I'm so homesick! Too bad, too bad, ain't it, when the fare's all paid, and they're a-looking fer us? We wouldn't git hungry nor cold there, neither, nor tired."

"Yes, but, grandpa dear, the p'liceman said we could find the way tomorrow in that great big building. Of course he must know, don't you think so?"

[Pg 63]"Say, Rosa," he asked excitedly, not noticing her question, and rising partly up, while his eyes sparkled with new hope, "I can't remember, but did it have a steeple a-p'intin' straight up?"

"Yes, such a big one, grandpa. It must go pretty nearly to the sky."

"Then it'll be all right, I'm mighty sure of that, but it 'pears like it'd ought to have green vines a-runnin' all over it, and with roses a-growin' 'round. Wuz there any?"

"No, grandpa, for this is winter, you know. The roses won't be blooming outdoors now, but sometimes I see them in the stores."

"And so we'll git there tomorrow, Rosa," he added dreamily, "and not be dis'p'inted no more! I'm so mighty glad, so mighty glad."

Grandpa was asleep, but becoming more and more restless. His hands no longer were cold, but felt hot to Rosa, as she vainly endeavored to keep them covered. The flushed cheeks and rapid breathing convinced his faithful and experienced young nurse that it would be wise for her to sit by his side till morning. The hours were long and dreary, and at every sound her overtaxed nerves would cause her to start. Sometimes she was sure that a policeman was coming after them; and again Mrs. Gray was about to enter the [Pg 64]room with a cruel whip in her hand. So certain was she once of hearing her mother call that she jumped to her feet to obey the summons. Then before her vision would stand a lovely girl dressed in blue, smiling down upon her and saying:

"Jesus paid all the fare long ago."

Toward morning grandpa grew more quiet. The little watcher dropped her head upon his pillow and fell asleep, dreaming that mother was holding her in her arms, softly singing as of yore.

[Pg 65]



VI.

THE WAY FOUND

It was late before they awakened the next morning. Rosa, though not much rested herself, was delighted to see grandpa apparently so well. She could not remember ever before having seen him step so lightly around the room. His eyes were shining, and every few minutes he would sing snatches of his one song, while assisting her in the preparation of their light breakfast.

"We're a-goin' to find it today, Rosa, I'm mighty sure, yes, mighty sure of that; and I'm so glad."

"I hope so, grandpa dear."

"Yes, we are, fer he said so."

"Who said so?"

"Why, Tom. Don't you remember? We seen him last night, Rosa. Surely you ain't fergot."

[Pg 66]"We wuz a-crossin' the pretty brook on the bridge under the willers, when all to once Tom come a-runnin' up, and wuz so glad to see us. Jest then the bell on the little white meetin' house with the steeple a-p'intin' straight up begun a-ringin', and it sounded better'n music. Oh, it wuz so mighty sweet, Rosa! I can 'most hear it now. And when we got there, the people was a-singin' about the beautiful land. Everybody wuz so happy, 'cause the fare wuz paid and they all know'd the way. Tom he says, 'Don't be dis'p'inted no more, father, 'cause you're a goin' to git there, and no mistake!'

"Now, Rosa dear," he continued, while walking rapidly back and forth across the room, "let's git ready and start right off, and not lose no more time.

"We're goin' to the big meetin' house today, didn't you say?"

"Yes, grandpa, the one the p'liceman showed us, you know."

"Pears like we'd ought to fix up a little bit then. My shoes look most mighty bad, don't they? It might worry Tom some. I don't like to have him find out how poor I've been, but then it won't make no difference after we git there.

"Say, do you think Sary would miss it, if I'd take some of her stove polish and black 'em up a little?"

[Pg 67]"Oh, I don't believe she would."

"Then I'll take jest a tiny bit, not that she'd care, fer Sary's a good woman, yes, a very good woman, but mighty partic'lar about her blackin'."

Rosa patiently assisted in the process, but it would have been difficult for the aesthetic eye to have discovered the improvement. Grandpa was satisfied, and that was enough.

"I don't want you to get cold like you did yesterday, grandpa. The wind's blowing hard. Wish you had more to put 'round you."

"Well, I ain't got it, dearie, but I don't mind, fer we're a-goin' to git there today. Tom'll look after me then."

"Here, you take this: it'll help a little," and she slipped from her own neck a well-worn muffler formerly belonging to her mother. She carefully pinned together his thin shabby coat, for the buttons long since were gone, and wrapped the muffler about his neck and face.

Her own clothing, since mother moved, had grown threadbare and ragged, forming but little protection against the cold, cutting winds.

Their hearts, notwithstanding all outward difficulties and the disappointments of the preceding day, were buoyant with hope as they started out once more upon their pilgrimage.

[Pg 68]Their one friend, the policeman, saw them coming and met them a short distance from their destination.

"Good morning, grandpa and my little lady," he cheerily called, "I have been expecting you for some time. I had almost begun to fear that something had prevented your coming. Follow me,

and I shall see that the usher gives you a seat up in front. I know you will find the way in here, and I have at last, thank God, found it myself!"

Rosa wondered at this, but could ask no questions. They were entering the imposing building now, while throngs of well-dressed people, eyeing her curiously, were surging by. She was disappointed, for her past experience had convinced her that no well-dressed person but her one girl in blue, knew the way to the beautiful land.

While she was considering the advisability of an immediate retreat, the policeman called to an usher:

"Here, Dawson, are some friends of mine whom I want Dr. Fairfax to meet personally. Send a messenger for him at once. I know he will be willing to come; then give them good seats where they can both hear and see. Do just as I say, for these are my very special friends," he added, as the usher looked at him both quizzically and uncertainly.

"And, Dawson, tell him, too, that I have found the way, praise the Lord!

[Pg 69]"I must go now, and God take care of you, Rosa. You have taught me what you so want to know yourself. The old Book says that a little child shall lead them, and it is true."

The usher hesitated somewhat to break the pastor's quiet half-hour which he had always spent with a few faithful workers before going into the pulpit, but seeing the tears beginning to roll down the sweet, sad face of the child, he sent the messenger post-haste.

Very soon a tall, handsome man appeared.

"Good morning, Mr. Dawson, and what may I do for you?" he pleasantly inquired.

Something about his voice and kindly manner attracted Rosa immediately, and, characteristically impulsive, not waiting for Mr. Dawson's reply she ran up to the stranger's side and said:

"Oh, please, mister, won't you tell me how to go? The policeman said you could. Grandpa and me want to go to the beautiful land, and mother's gone. Folks don't cough no more there, and Jesus paid all the fare, 'cause the pretty lady said so, and it don't cost nothing after you get there. Can you tell me the way?"

The pastor in his surprise stood motionless for a moment, then astonished Mr. Dawson by lifting the little girl up in his arms and kissing her fondly.

"Rosa," he said, "you are the straying lamb for [Pg 70]whom Esther and I have been praying for weeks, and now God has sent you. By His help I shall teach you the way this very morning.

"This is grandpa, is it not?" he added, grasping the old man cordially by the hand. "I am indeed very glad to see you.

"Mr. Dawson, you are needed to seat the people. I shall escort these to a pew myself."

The trio a few minutes later slowly passing down the aisle was certainly unusually striking. The pastor, with head erect and thoroughly conscious that many were displeased, was half supporting upon his strong right arm the shabbily-dressed and feeble man, while the child in ragged apparel he tenderly led by the hand.

An observant eye might have noted various expressions upon the faces in the audience. Some evidently were disgusted that their popular pastor would so demean himself. Others were interested because of the oddity of the scene, still others amused, while here and there was one conversant with the language of the Master and who prayed God's blessing to abide upon all three.

Belonging to the first-named class was Dr. Dale, wealthy, cautiously conservative always, aristocratic, exclusive in his circle of friends, and who wished also to be exclusive in his church relationship. The knowledge [Pg 71]of his power over the majority of his acquaintances was a source of constant gratification to the proud man, but the fact that his pastor would not bow the knee to his wealth and position chafed him sorely. The events of this particular Sunday morning he took as only another personal insult.

"Umph!" he grunted in deep displeasure, and reached over to pick up his hat preparatory to leaving. He could not countenance anything so ridiculously absurd. If the pastor's eccentricities continued to develop as they had in the last year, he would be compelled to seek another and more congenial church home, where form was more in evidence.

Prim little Mrs. Dale, the one person in the world who could influence her austere husband, gently tapped him upon the arm and whispered:

"Stay, my dear, and see what comes of it all. It is really quite unusual."

"Well," he thought, "I'll stay to please her, and in the meantime take a nap."

More to his discomfiture than ever, Dr. Fairfax had seated the strange pair directly across the aisle from him in the pew with Esther.

Glancing over to note the effect upon her, Mr. Dale saw that she took the little girl up into her lap, bestowing upon her fond caresses. He looked long enough [Pg 72]for Rosa's large brown eyes to meet his own, then with a great heart pang turned away. When had he ever seen so perfect a likeness to his own Margaret, his only and idolized darling, who had left his home the year before? Something seemed to be clutching at his heart most relentlessly, while a lump was filling his throat. Nervously and hastily lest his wife might see, he wiped from his brow the gathering perspiration. Persistently he endeavored to settle down for the nap, but with eyes either closed or open, all he could see was the child across the aisle. One moment he wished to fold her within his arms so strangely empty for twelve long months, and the next mentally upbraided her for so cruelly tearing open the one deep wound of his life.

Presently he became aware that the voluntary had ceased, and that a restlessness was sweeping over the great audience. Arousing himself somewhat from his harrowing reveries, he looked at his watch and found that it was ten minutes past the time for the service to begin, and Dr. Fairfax had not yet entered the pulpit.

While the people were wondering what the cause of the delay might be, he appeared.

An unusual note of tenderness in the invocation prepared the auditors in some degree for what followed.

"Brethren," he said, "it is recorded in Holy Writ that Jesus took a child and set it in the midst of [Pg 73]them. Just as truly has He set in our midst today a child, and for this reason the whole order of service shall be changed. God helping me, I shall hide behind the cross, that the people may see Jesus only, and I shall present the way of salvation so simply that wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.

"We are living in a rationalistic age, when by many the God of miracles is denied; when the incarnation of the Son of God is considered a fable, having its counterpart in nearly all religions; when a belief in a literal hell and a literal heaven is becoming obsolete; when the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, making it possible to escape the one and gain the other, is held as a relic of superstition; when the verbal inspiration of the Bible is ridiculed; and when character-building is rapidly superseding the belief in the necessity of the new birth.

"Perhaps I have not been sufficiently determined myself to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and have spoken too often upon popular themes. Today I shall not speak upon the subject announced, 'Applied Christianity the Remedy for Social Evils,' but," and he looked down upon Rosa to be sure that she understood, "'Heaven, or the Way to the Beautiful Land.' Preparatory to what I may say, I shall read the last two chapters of Revelation."

[Pg 74]"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

"And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

[Pg 75]"And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

"And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

"And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth * * * *

"And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones * * * * And the [Pg 76]twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

"And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of [Pg 77] God and of the Lamb shall be in it: and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His names shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever * * * *

"Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

This incomparable description of the New Jerusalem, read in a finely modulated voice, had a marked effect upon the audience, though the reader was conscious of the presence of but three, Rosa, grandpa, and the Lord Jesus Himself.

Dr. Dale was more disgusted than ever, or at least tried to be.

"What unreasonable fanaticism!" he thought. "When men leave their homes and business to attend church, they want something practical, something acting as a stimulus in daily life. Being surrounded as we are on every hand by social evils, strife between capital and labor, and with anarchical tendencies becoming constantly more prevalent, we need something bearing directly upon these problems. There'll be time enough for these other things. Of course I believe [Pg 78]in heaven, for Margaret is there, and when I die I want to go to her.

"I wish Dr. Fairfax had left these vagrants where they belong. The child's face haunts me. Her eyes are almost as starry and full of expression as Margaret's. That's the queerest little old man I ever saw. I can't see how they happen to be here."

And so his mind wandered restlessly on during the preliminary services.

"Let all the people," announced the speaker, "join in singing that old hymn which some of us have not heard in years, 'The Home of the Soul.'"

The great organ filled the vast auditorium with the strains of the melody, followed by a volume of sweetest song. Many were carried back to the scenes of their childhood, where, gathered around the family altar, were the dear ones long since singing in paradise.

The strangers across the aisle again attracted Dr. Dale's attention. The old man was leaning forward with both hands resting upon his cane, his eyes were closed, and the tears were slowly trickling down the wrinkled face, while with a plaintive, quavery voice he was joining in the singing of his well-beloved song.

At last it was time for the sermon, but the preacher, who by his eloquence and magnetic personality could [Pg 79]sway thousands, felt as helpless as a little child to perform the duty before him.

He announced his text: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way" (John 14:6).

The audience wondered why at that particular point he stopped apparently to offer a word of silent prayer. But then they could not see the expression of hope flash across the face of the child, nor the old man lean still a little farther forward that he might catch every word.

"Rosa," whispered grandpa, "didn't I tell you if we'd go to a meetin' house with the steeple a-p'intin' straight up, we'd find the way? Yes, yes, that's it, it surely is, Rosa, and it's all a-beginnin' to come back. Jesus is the way, Jesus is the way! I wonder I ain't thought of it before."

The sermon which followed, simple in every detail, began by calling attention to the marvelously beautiful description of the heavenly land as contained in the Scripture previously read.

"There are representatives here today of many classes and conditions of society," said the speaker, "the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant; but there is no eye that has not shed bitter tears, no life unacquainted with death, sorrow, crying, or pain. Thank God for that glad coming day [Pg 80]when He will wipe away all tears, when there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain; for these things shall have passed away!"

He spoke of the glimpse the Scripture gives of the city itself, the New Jerusalem, with its walls and gates. "There is no language of earth by which its glories can be fully described," he continued; "where our idea of beauty leaves off, there heaven begins! Even its foundations are made of the rarest jewels we know.

"But heaven's happiness consists not in mere outward things. God is there, and the Lamb! In God's presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand are to be found the truest pleasures for evermore. There the redeemed out of every nation shall serve Him, and they shall see His face with no veil of time or sense between.

"This holy city will never be marred by the entering in of anything that defileth, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life shall behold and enjoy its splendor and happiness.

"I think I hear some poor soul say: 'Then there is no hope for me!'

"Yes, there is hope!

"But I have sinned!"

"That is true. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one. We are by nature and practice strangers to God, [Pg 81]even the new-born babe having wrapped up within its tiny bosom a sinful heritage and bias. And the soul that sinneth shall die. But sin can be put away, and its dreadful penalty escaped. Shall I not tell you how?

"It is by the love and grace of our heavenly Father that we can be justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God loved us in our sin and rebellion, and sent His only-begotten Son to bring earth's inhabitants back to Himself, that they might share the joys of the heavenly home. Ere He came to earth, an angel of the Lord appeared and said His name should be called Jesus, for He should save His people from their sins. When at length He was born, the angel appeared to the wondering shepherds on the hillside near Bethlehem, and said: 'Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day a Saviour.' He came to seek and save the lost. For thirty years He lived a secluded but holy life at Nazareth. Then for three years He went about doing good, working marvelous miracles and saying wonderful words. At length they took Him, and crucified Him on Calvary! 'Behold,' John had said, 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!' Do you not see how it is? Christ died—not for His own sins, for He was holy, harmless, undefiled, but for your sins and mine. He bore our [Pg 82]sins in His body on the cross. Believe on Him, and you are saved!

"Yes, childlike trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour gives your soul peace with God and makes your entrance into the house of many mansions sure! He went back to prepare a place for us who believe on Him, and promised to come again and receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. Jesus Himself is the way home!"

So clearly did he explain the plan of salvation that Rosa began to grasp the truth. All the pent-up love of her ardent nature she began to bestow upon Jesus, and in the joy of this new experience forgot her crushing sorrow.

The sermon closed by another extended reference to heaven, with special emphasis upon the fact of its being real, and not simply a state of blissful being, as many profess to believe, and with an appeal to the skeptical to take Jesus at His word.

"He said, 'I go to prepare a *place* for you.' Is it not His positive statement sufficient? Has He ever proved untrue to His promises concerning this life? Has He ever turned a deaf ear to the penitent sinner's prayer? Has He ever refused to speak the word of comfort to the heart breaking beneath its load? Has He ever called one to some particular service in His vineyard [Pg 83]without supplying the needed strength? Has He ever forgotten to pour forth His abundant and sustaining grace upon the trusting soul about the pass through the dark, mysterious valley of death? And would He say that He was going to prepare a *place* for us, that where He is there we may be also,

meaning only that He was going to prepare a state of glorified—*nothingness*? Impossible! It is an insult to our Lord.

"He who left the glory-circled throne for thirty-three years of wandering in this world, for rejection by those whom He came to save, for Gethsemane and for Calvary, will hold up no false hope to lure onward those who love Him.

"He who created this beautiful world, inhabited by fallen sinful beings, will not forget to provide a home for His own who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Yes, heaven is a place, where the power of infinity itself is exhausted in the beautifying thereof! No sin, no sickness, no sorrow will ever pass through those gates of pearl. The saints of all ages are there, our loved ones whom we have lost a while are there, and above all our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

"Ah, if Satan has deluded you into a state of unbelief now, the time is coming when you will believe! Some day with unwilling feet you must part from your[Pg 84] Lord forever to spend eternity in hell; or with hosannas and shouts of victory upon your lips, you will pass into the presence of Him who sits upon the throne, to praise Him and serve Him forever and ever!"

At the conclusion of the service, Dr. and Mrs. Dale left without waiting to speak to the pastor.

Mrs. Dale, however, stopped ostensibly to greet Esther, but in reality to look more closely at the child who had attracted her quite as much as her husband.

The doctor's perturbed state did not admit of his speaking to any one. He longed for Margaret, and both loved and hated the little waif who unconsciously had so remarkably altered the affairs of the whole morning. He had endeavored not to listen to the sermon, "fit only for children, and not for men possessed of a logical turn of mind," he said to himself; but the more he tried, with the greater persistency did the ringing sentences surge through his aching brain.

"Well!" he exclaimed to his wife as soon as they were seated in their carriage, "Dr. Fairfax is a narrow-minded extremist, a fanatic. What right had he to bring those street wanderers into the church this morning? The place for them is down at the mission. Do I not give liberally toward its support? To be sure, such as they need the Gospel, but I want them to stay where they belong to get it."

[Pg 85]"But, my dear," placidly remonstrated his wife, "there may be qualifying circumstances connected with all this which we do not understand."

"Possibly, but scarcely probable anything to warrant such an unheard-of innovation! The place for them is down at the mission, I say.

"And that sermon, if such it may be called! I thought I was at a funeral. There were hundreds of men there, who like myself went for something helpful and practical. Who cares to discuss the heavenly city when our city down here is in the throes of a strike, threatening to paralyze business for weeks and months to come, and meaning the loss of millions of dollars, both directly and indirectly?"

"I know, dear, but the Father's omnipotent hand of love will bring everything out right some day. He has promised, and His promises never fail. Is it not restful, and does it not make one more brave for the conflict, to know that there is an abiding city, at whose portals we leave earth's sorrows and perplexities?"

"Yes, wife, I know, but we are living now upon this mundane sphere, and naturally our interests center here. A belief in heaven does not straighten out affairs on earth, nor make the burdens any the lighter to bear."

"I do not know about that, since Margaret has gone. If I did not believe what Dr. Fairfax said this morning, [Pg 86]my burden, at least, would be much heavier and harder to bear. It does help to know that she is safe, and that I shall join her myself some day."

"Oh, well, yes, of course, but then it's different when it comes to Margaret!"

For several minutes they rode in silence, when the doctor said:

"Wife, did you see that child's eyes?"

"Yes, I saw them."

"I wish—well, we are home now! Let me assist you from the carriage."

In the meantime, grandpa and Rosa were having an experience very novel to them.

Upon discovering grandpa's weak condition, a carriage had been ordered, the first one in which they had ever ridden. Esther was quietly explaining to Rosa more of Jesus and His love for the children, while her receptive little soul was eagerly taking it all in.

"Then," she said, "I can't go to the beautiful land till He sends for me! I do wish He would send soon."

"No, but He surely will send some day, Rosa, and perhaps He wants you to teach others how to get there."

"If He does, then I'm willing to stay, 'cause so many don't know."

In her broken childish way, Rosa told of the many [Pg 87]and varied experiences befalling her and grandpa since mother moved.

Esther and her father were greatly touched by the pathos of the narrative, but what left the deepest impression was that in her eager quest she could find no one for so long to help her.

There in the privacy of their carriage they gave themselves anew to the work of the Lord, pledging never again to let a known opportunity to speak to a needy soul pass by.

Grandpa, like a tired child, was resting his head upon the shoulder of his new friend during the drive, and it was evident that he was very ill. The fever was returning, the mind partially wandering, but the soul rejoicing in the light of that land which he so soon was to enter.

"Ah, Rosa," he murmured over and over, "I told you so. Jesus is the way, Jesus is the way! I'm mighty glad it's all come back, but Tom he said 'twould, and I think he' a-comin' now to git me."

Upon their arrival home, with tender hands the weary old man was put to bed, while Esther took charge of Rosa, clothing her in more suitable garments, and talking simply of the Shepherd who seeks the wandering lambs.

[Pg 88]



VII.

VICTORY!

The deserted rooms on Burton street suddenly became the scene of great activity early Monday afternoon.

Mrs. Gray's supersensitive conscience would not admit of her neglecting her charges, so in consequence her visit was made a few hours shorter than first planned.

The fire was out, and no trace could she find of Rosa and grandpa. She "hollered till her throat was sore," looked in every reasonable—and unreasonable—corner, searched up and down the hall, inquired of her neighbors, visited the corner grocery, but all to no avail.

"Land sakes!" over and over she repeated to a group of interested spectators, "I might a-know'd better'n to have gone off and left them. This is jest my luck, [Pg 89]anyhow. The first time I've been away in five years, then have this happen. I'm jest real provoked, and I don't think a body could blame me, either. But it all comes of me bein' so obligin'. If it wuzn't fer my tender heart, I'd never kep' Tom's father, nor took Mis' Browning's young one, then I could come and go as I pleased and not be pestered this way. There ain't many that'd do fer others what I do, and I never git no thanks fer it, neither. If I hadn't had father to board all these years, I might have somethin' laid up fer a rainy day, and there ain't nobody but what'll say I'm industrious and savin'.

"But I can't think where they'd go, nor what I can do. It seems like somebody'd seen them. I'll fix them when they git back, so as they'll never do it ag'in. It looks like they'd been gone fer some time, and I do b'lieve they've been into the tea and stove blackin'. I never thought about blackin', who would? but I told them not to touch that tea, fer I couldn't afford it. They'll be sorry, they will, when I git hold of them.

"Here you, Billy Bruce!" she vociferously called, catching sight of that youth running down the stairs three steps at a time; "come right back here at fast as you can, and tell me what you know about Rosa and grandpa. You're always under foot a-knowin' what's a-goin' on, so I 'spose if anybody seen them you did."

[Pg 90]Billy feared Mrs. Gray more than he did the judge or policeman—that is, at close range; but when occupying the vantage-ground, as at the present, he delighted in revolt.

"I didn't either see them," he shouted back, "and don't know nothin' about them, only I'd run off, too, if I wuz them."

At this the greatly abused and misunderstood woman picked up a piece of coal to hurl at the rapidly retreating young rebel, when, to her astonishment, she saw coming up the steps the transformed Rosa with Esther!

"You'd better look out, Rosa," confidently explained Billy, "she's awful mad, and you may git that lickin' yet, you said she'd been a-promisin'."

Rosa shrank in terror, her face growing pale and twitching nervously, while an inclination to run away with her barbarous but devoted champion took possession of her.

"Never mind, dear," whispered Esther reassuringly, "she will do you no harm while I am with you. You need not be at all afraid."

Upon looking into the fearless blue eyes of Esther, Mrs. Gray suddenly determined to change her plan of attack.

"Land sakes, Rosa! I've been that worried about you and father, the dear old soul,—where is he? and where [Pg 91]have you been, and where did you git them pretty clothes? Why didn't you tell me you wanted to go on a visit, and what made you stay so long? Of course it wuz awful lonesome here without me, so I won't blame you much, but children'd ought to tell."

Not giving the child an opportunity to answer, a volley of interrogations and information was turned upon Esther.

"What's your name? Esther Fairfax, is it? well, now that's a real pretty name, but do come right in and set down. Things is in a muss, fer I've been gone, and children don't amount to much fer work, 'specially when they ain't been raised right. I ain't had her long, you know, or she'd be different. Her ma wuz awful queer and silly about her. But where did you find her? You wuz real thoughtful to bring her back to me, so as I wouldn't worry any longer'n necessary. I 'spose you found her clothes in bad shape. Her ma's been dead now a while, and didn't keep things up as well as she might anyhow, I thought, fer some time. She wuz one of them women that gives up easy, but that's somethin' I never do. I've been a-layin' out to show Rosa how to sew. She's plenty old enough, and I ain't got no time to do it myself. But then I never did b'lieve in bringin' them up lazy. There's a lot in gittin' them started right.

[Pg 92]"And where on earth's the old man? I can't think how you found them. Seems like a month since I seen him, but then I have more attachment and affection than most folks, or I wouldn't a been so flustered. I hope he's acted with some sense, so as I won't have to be mortified."

Endeavoring to impress her guest favorably, Mrs. Gray, while talking, was energetically moving about the room, making some pretense toward bringing order out of confusion.

"That grease spot down there on the floor by the stove does really worry me a heap, and I'd really ought to—"

At this Rosa cast a glance at the whip still reposing above the door, and tightened her clasp upon Esther's hand.

"Father's awful childish, and I have to treat him jest like a child, too, or I couldn't git on with him no how. I've kep' him now, well, let me see: it's a-goin' on six years since Tom got killed, and I've been a-supportin' him ever since, and no tellin' how much longer he'll live. If it wuzn't fer my kind heart, I'd tell him he'd have to leave. I've thought of it some lately, but then s'pose I never will. Then when Mis' Browning died, of course she wanted me to raise Rosa. It's a good thing she did die fer now Rosa'll learn to do somethin'[Pg 93] more'n jest to be kissed and cried over. I used to git that provoked at her ma fer actin' so silly. I didn't say she could stay here only till spring. Of course she come in real handy like when father didn't mind and I twisted my ankle, but then it's sech a bother to raise a child. When she ain't no more use to me, I don't know how it'll be then."

During this recital, Esther's face was a study. She had visited much among the poor with her father, but never before had she come into contact with quite so unusual a character as Mrs. Gray. Finding that her only opportunity to state her errand was to interrupt the loquacious speaker, she determined to wait no longer.

"Mrs. Gray, I have come to tell you that you will never again be troubled by grandpa or Rosa. Grandpa is in my home, and the physician says that he can live but a few hours longer. He has had a raging fever, but that has left now; he is entirely rational and wishes to see you before the Master calls.

"My carriage is waiting. There is no time to lose. Put on your wraps and come immediately."

So surprised was Mrs. Gray that for the instant an almost unprecedented thing occurred: she could think of nothing to say. But endeavoring to gain her normal poise, she turned upon Rosa.

[Pg 94]"Well, you heard what the lady said! Father, the dear old soul, of course he wants to see me before he dies, after all I've done fer him; but how lonely it'll be without him! Seems like I can see him a-settin' over there in his chair now, a-lookin' out of the winder, like he did 'most all day sometimes."

At this appropriate juncture, she made a fruitless effort to shed a few tears, but, to be charitable, the deepest sorrow cannot find expression in tears.

"You can stay here, Rosa, and have supper ready when I git back, and make me some tea; I'll need it to settle my nerves. Take them fine clothes off, too, before you spoil 'em. I want you to learn to be savin', like I've always been. And give that grease spot another scrubbin', and go to the corner grocery and git—"

"No, Mrs. Gray," vehemently interposed Esther, "did I not tell you that Rosa is never going to live with you again? You are about to realize your dream of liberty, for which without a doubt

you are duly grateful. You seem to feel that both grandpa and Rosa have been intolerable burdens."

Esther was the repetition of her father, and when the case demanded could be firm and commandingly dignified.

Again Mrs. Gray was speechless. For so long she [Pg 95] had been absolute monarch in her small realm, with none daring to question or to rise in rebellion, that it was a revelation to find in a young woman like Esther an opposite and stronger force with which to reckon.

For the first time in her life she was completely conquered, and without another word marched solemnly down to the carriage.

"This is an opportunity," thought Esther, "and may I be directed in all I say."

Not wishing this woman possessed of a hard heart and a shriveled soul to stand in awe of her any longer, a few kind and ordinary remarks soon accomplished the desired end.

"Well, Miss Esther, you ain't told me how it's all come about. I can't fer the life of me think, and it all seems so strange. I jest can't git it through my head that father's a-goin' to die. Are you real sure of it? Mebbe there's a mistake."

"No, Mrs. Gray, there is no mistake. In a few hours he will be safe forever in the better land."

Esther's power of narration was well developed. Going into the minute details, she simply told the whole story, while Mrs. Gray attentively listened without an interruption. There were indications that the hitherto impregnable fortress of this untutored woman's heart was beginning to totter. But is there after [Pg 96] all in this great world a heart so loveless, so blackened by sin, or so narrowed by its own selfish domain, as to be entirely invincible? Cannot the love emanating from Christ Himself, flowing through the channel of a surrendered life, leave its impress where all else fails?

Esther's observant eye noted the change, then skilfully she began speaking of the Lord as a personal Saviour.

Presently tears began rolling down the hardened cheeks, causing the young messenger to feel that victory was almost certain.

Upon reaching the Fairfax home, Mrs. Gray was ushered into a room, which to her seemed magnificent.

Grandpa was lying upon an immaculate bed, while everything surrounding him was far more indicative of loving thoughtfulness than of luxury. In his hand he clasped a beautiful rose, because during his rational moments he so often spoke of the "pretty roses a-growin' by the brook down in the lane." The rose was presented by none other than Dr. Dale, not—so he assured himself—that he was in the least sympathetic with the Fairfaxes in their eccentric freak. It was simply for the good of the patient that all small whims be humored.

Upon a nearby table was Esther's violin. During the long hours of the preceding night, when the burning [Pg 97] fever produced a great restlessness in the weary sufferer, nothing soothed him but the low, sweet strains of music.

Now he was calm, and for the first time since Tom died clothed in his right mind.

"Sary, how be you?" he feebly asked, as she slowly walked up to his side. "I'm so glad you've come, fer it's all straightened out now, and I want to thank you afore I go fer all you've done fer me. And may somebody take care of you real kind when you git old and can't work no more. I've been a big bother, Sary. You've had a good deal to put up with since Tom died, but you've been mighty kind. You've always give me enough to eat, and kep' me warm, and you've had to work awful hard to do it. I thank you, Sary, and may God bless you! But I do want you to find Jesus, the way to the beautiful land. You won't have it so hard there. He's paid for everything, and it's free fer the askin'."

"Oh, father," she said, dropping upon her knees and weeping bitterly for the first time in many years, "you ain't got nothin' to thank me fer. I've never seen till jest this minute how awful mean I've been. You did your very best to please me, and the harder you tried, the more I scolded. I wish I'd been better to you. No, you ain't got nothin' at all to thank me fer, and I'll [Pg 98]miss you so! I don't know why I've never seen it before, and you've always been so good. I'll never git over feelin' mean about it, no, I never will, oh dear, dear!"

"There, there, Sary, don't cry! It's all right now."

Tenderly he stroked the hand which many times had been raised threateningly against him, and tried to soothe the thoroughly conscience-stricken woman.

"Sary, I do want you to find Jesus. It's so mighty sweet to know Him, and He'll help you over all the hard places,—He says He will; and He always carries the heavy end of the load, too."

"I'm too wicked and mean, father. He wouldn't have me," she sobbed, "but I wish He would; I need Him bad, and want help."

"Mrs. Gray,"—it was the minister who spoke and who had been a silent witness of the pathetic scene,—"Jesus died to save you."

"I wish I knew it," she moaned, "but I'm too mean. I'm the biggest sinner in the world to treat father and Rosa the way I have."

"If you are the biggest sinner in the world, then I know that Jesus died to save you. Listen to His word: 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.' You consider yourself the chief of sinners, do you?"

[Pg 99]"Yes, I do; I know I am."

"Who came to save the chief of sinners?"

"Why, the verse says Christ Jesus did."

"Yes, Mrs. Gray, that is true. Then whom did Jesus Christ come to save?"

"Oh, He came to save me, He came to save me! How could He ever do it?"

"Just because God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Do you believe it?"

"Yes, how can I help it, when He done all that?"

"Then if you believe in Him, what have you?"

"Everlasting life! Everlasting life!" Dreamily, yet joyously, she repeated the words many times, trying to comprehend their fathomless depths.

"But," she anxiously asked, "what about my sins? You don't know how mean I've been."

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

"Oh, thank God, thank God! He's give me everlasting life, and won't remember my sins. I want to begin all over now, and do somethin' fer Him before I die."

In broken petitions she poured forth her heart in prayer to God, while at the same moment angelic songs [Pg 100]were started anew around the throne above. Another soul was born again.

Is there less rejoicing over there when the soul saved chances to be the tenant of a roughly-hewn temple? Ah no, for it required the shedding of just the same precious blood as for the souls of earth's greatest and noblest!

An expression of unspeakable peace lighted up grandpa's happy face, as he murmured:

"Oh, Sary, I'm so glad, so mighty glad! Now I'll tell Tom you're a-comin', and we'll both be a-watchin' fer you. Won't we be happy when we all git safe home? Goodby, Sary! You've always been a good woman, yes, a very good woman, and now Jesus will take care of you. Goodby, till we meet ag'in!"

The effort of speaking seemed to exhaust him perceptibly, and he sank off into a deep sleep.

It was evident that the end was near, and hastily Dr. Dale was summoned. Upon examining his patient, he found that in a few minutes, or perhaps a half an hour at the most, all would be over.

Silently they watched him. Rosa understood better now than she did a few weeks before what the "moving" meant. She knew that she would be lonely without grandpa, her one comforter through many a dark and dreary hour, and the tears began to gather.

[Pg 101]At this Dr. Dale became restless. Just to avoid a scene, he took the little girl up into his arms, wiping away the tears and whispering words of comfort.

Mrs. Gray sat nearest the dying man, gently smoothing back the snowy locks from his forehead. His breath was growing shorter and shorter, but there was no struggle. Suddenly his eyes opened, and with a smile of recognition he greeted each one.

"Oh," he faintly whispered, "Jesus is the way, Jesus is the way! Sing to me my song, won't you, please?"

With difficulty Esther and her father complied with the request, while the doctor walked nervously up and down the room with Rosa still in his arms.

"Oh, how sweet it will be in that beautiful land, So free from all sorrow and pain, With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands, To meet one another again!"

As the words of the last verse died away, the soul took its flight to rejoice forever in the presence of the King.

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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VIII.

DUST TO DUST.

The events of Sunday morning had occasioned much comment upon the part of Dr. Fairfax's parishioners.

The majority, after taking time for consideration, approved, and became intensely interested to know the outcome of the strange proceeding. During the few hours of grandpa's illness many messengers called to learn the latest news, and it cheered the pastor's heart to find that after all he was far from being alone in his love for God's neglected poor.

He had planned a quiet funeral, and was arranging to that effect when requests from all sides began pouring in that it might be held in the church.

"It is a signal opportunity, father," Esther had said when consulted, so a public funeral was soon announced [Pg 103]together with another innovation. Instead of the customary floral offerings, it was suggested that the people bring gifts of money to place upon the casket, to be used in the forwarding of city mission work.

At the hour appointed, the small procession wended its way to the church.

Dr. Dale had found it advisable for himself and wife to join the funeral party. It was natural that Esther should look after Mrs. Gray, who never before had been in so fine a building, and it would be awkward for her to have charge of Rosa as well. Then really the child was very nervous and might suddenly need professional attention. All things considered, there was no alternative: he must keep her with him.

Both curiosity and genuine interest attracted a great crowd, causing the pastor once more to feel his need of hiding behind the cross, that the people might behold Jesus only.

In all his wide and varied experience, this funeral pre-eminently was the most unique. Conventionality was laid aside. There was no sermon, but the story of the last few days of the victor's life was told so graphically that the audience was held in almost breathless silence.

"Brethren," said the speaker in closing, "how must we appear in the sight of God, who loved us to the extent [Pg 104]of giving His only Son to die for our sins, when it is possible for one to live long, weary years in our midst with none to tell him of Jesus? Can we expect ever to hear from His lips the welcome plaudit, 'Well done!' when we are no more zealous than this for the souls whom He came to save?

"I fear that many who profess to love Him will fall far short of the 'abundant entrance,' and will stand ashamed before Him at His appearing.

"Can it be true that we are selfish to the extent of being satisfied simply with our own salvation, when His heart of infinite love and compassion is yearning with unfathomable tenderness over the lost?

"We have the opportunity now which angels may well covet, that of leading souls to Christ. This priceless privilege is intrusted to us only for the one brief moment of our earthly existence, and how we should prize it above all things else!

"Consider the fact that one million of years hence, yea, millions of millions of years, your happiness and capacity for enjoying Christ and heaven depend upon the manner of your spending this present vapor called life. When eventually we are ushered through the gates of the Eternal City, it will then be forever too late for this one blood-purchased pleasure of telling salvation's story to the lost.

[Pg 105]"It seems a paradox that it is possible for one to be a Christian without having a consuming passion for souls. But in reality the whole matter centers not upon our love for those around us, but upon our love for the Lord Jesus Himself. When we are in unbroken fellowship with Christ, the natural result is love for those so dear to Him. 'The love of Jesus is not an absorbing, but a radiating love. The more we love Him, the more shall we most certainly love others.' Each new revelation of Himself graciously granted unto His followers only draws us the nearer to Him, the fountain of eternal love, where we drink to our fill and are imbued with an all-consuming desire to carry the life-giving water unto others.

"Nor can we gaze long at the cross, at the cruelly mutilated brow of our Saviour, at His body torn and bruised by the merciless scourging, at the five bleeding wounds, nor can we listen to the cry of His broken heart, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' without being melted with love and filled with a holy zeal to serve Him every moment of our lives. One real view of the cross changes all. The things of this life, where we shall be located and how we shall be situated, will have no more effect upon us, if only we may glorify Him.

"Many have taken the first step, giving into His [Pg 106]keeping their souls for eternity, but will you not now, while beholding Him hanging on yonder cross for you, give Him your lives as well? The only life worth the living is the surrendered life. Time is uncertain, eternity sure. Now and *only now* may we prove to Him our love, and know the fellowship of His sufferings.

"I ask every Christian here today, who is willing henceforth to yield his life, his time, his all, unconditionally into the hands of the Master and to go forth seeking those who need help, to arise."

The speaker, though pale from emotion, calmly folded his arms and looked over the audience to see what the result might be.

He knew that the crisis in the life of his church had arrived, and should the King have the victory, or no?

For a moment there was not a stir. Then the preacher himself could scarcely believe what he saw.

Dr. Dale, still holding Rosa in his arms, slowly arose, love and determination being depicted upon the hitherto cold and dignified countenance. The effect was pronounced. Soon hundreds were upon their feet, while some one started the song:

"I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed
That thou might'st ransomed be

[Pg 107]

And quickened from the dead; I gave My life for thee:
What hast thou done for Me?

"My Father's house of light, My glory-circled throne,
I left for earthly night, For wanderings sad
and lone; I left it all for thee: Hast thou left aught for Me?

"I suffered much for thee, More than thy tongue can tell,
Of bitterest agony, To rescue thee from
hell; I've borne it all for thee: What hast thou borne for Me?

"And I have brought to thee, Down from my home above,
Salvation full and free, My pardon and
My love; I bring rich gifts to thee: What hast thou brought to Me?"

At the conclusion of the song the pastor led in a consecration prayer, knowing that in many the bonds of worldliness were forever snapped asunder, and that henceforth the victorious, overcoming life would be theirs, making themselves heirs of the promise: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My [Pg 108] throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."

After a few moments of silence, the quartette softly sang "The Home of the Soul," while a vast procession slowly marched before the casket, placing upon it gifts of silver, gold and bank notes all in one great heap.

At last all that was earthly of him whose simple life and final victory had proven so powerful a sermon, was tenderly carried out and laid to rest in a beautiful lot purchased by Dr. Dale, while the setting sun was painting the western sky with almost heavenly glory.

"God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."



IX.

"A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM."

The day was over.

Esther and her father, possessed of a calm, holy joy deeper than ever before, were seated in his study, while with them were Dr. and Mrs. Dale, Rosa and Mrs. Gray.

Esther had been undergoing a struggle, for it would be hard to give Rosa up. She had planned to keep her as her own little sister, to educate her, to train her in things both temporal and spiritual, and to guard her till she should develop into a pure, strong, noble woman.

Now she felt that it must be otherwise, for evidently God had so determined. Knowing that His will always would be her deliberate choice, could she see the [Pg 110]end from the beginning as He can, she was growing positively happy at this unexpected turn of events. It was a part of her religion not to be simply passively submissive to His will, but in it always to rejoice. The psalmist's declaration, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God," was the expression of her heart's desire.

Mrs. Dale, though with an eye upon the child, was quietly talking to Mrs. Gray of the privileges and duties befalling the Christian.

Dr. Dale was clasping Rosa closely to his breast, while now and then a tear dropped upon her curly head.

"Pastor," he said after a long interval of silence, "the battle has raged fiercely since Sunday morning, but thanks be to God, He has given me the strength with which to gain the victory.

"You know how selfish I have been, how taken up with the affairs of this world and the amassing of riches. For many years I have had no vital interest in other things. I have prided myself upon my uprightness and morality, considering that I was a worthy example for any to follow, and a decidedly successful man. Now the fallacy of my position I see, and realize that the best part of my life has been wasted—more than wasted!

"When you walked down the aisle with Rosa and [Pg 111]grandpa, Satan made upon me a relentless onslaught. It seemed that there were two mighty and opposing forces within, each

struggling for the supremacy. I did not yield entirely to the right till this afternoon, for I have gloried in my reputation of being influenced by no one.

"For years I have not been satisfied, knowing myself to be slipping farther and farther away from God. I have longed for the joy of my first love, but He could not take me back with my hands so tenaciously holding to the things of this world.

"Today the tempter told me that there would be no use in my surrendering, for I would not prove true, and anyhow that it was only a matter of excitement and not of firm conviction. I fully realize that I have no power in myself, and that the first moment I look away from Christ I shall fall. I am resting on the promise that He is able to keep me from falling and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

"Your message Sunday and your message today burned deeply into my soul, but it is this little girl whom God was pleased to use in the breaking of my stony, icy heart. I wish to take her as my own daughter, knowing that she will lead me still closer to the Lord she loves so well.

[Pg 112]"Rosa," he asked tenderly, "are you willing to be my little girl instead of my Margaret whom God has taken to Himself?"

For her answer she slipped her arms about his neck and kissed him, while Mrs. Dale smiled through her tears upon the happy pair.

"My brother, may God bless you and keep you," fervently responded the pastor, "leading you from victory up into victory.

"You are not the only one to be filled with gratitude for having been brought under the influence of this child. I too view life differently, seeing more clearly than ever the duty, nay, privilege of personal soul-saving work for the Master. Rosa's quest has brought me face to face with the insignificance of this world, and the realities of the next. Her attitude is only what that of every true follower of God should be. Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. If we could only remember our position in Him, the surrendered life would be the natural outcome, and, like Rosa, our faces continually would be turned toward the beautiful land.

"This is only another verification of the fact that a little child shall lead them.

"Yes, it means a rich and new blessing to me!"

"And to me, too," softly sobbed Mrs. Gray, "fer it's [Pg 113]all come through her, the sweet lamb, and I've been a-threat'nin' to lick her. She was that patient when my ankle was twisted, that I'll never fergit it, no never! I can see now how she'd shake of fear when she'd come up to me, then run to poor old father fer a bit of comfort. I didn't know it then, but do now, that she was 'most a-starvin' fer the kind of love she didn't git. How she must have missed her ma! Oh, I've been so awful mean! I don't see how God can fergive me, but I know He has. I never knew'd before that the Saviour is fer sech as me. Tom used to try to tell me, and I wouldn't let him. He wuz good, and I wuzn't. And dear old father! How happy he and Tom must be tonight, but it'll be dreadfully lonesome with them all gone. I wish I could have Rosa back ag'in, though I'm awful glad she's to have sech a good home. And I made sech a fuss about a-keepin' her till spring. If it hadn't been

fer her, I don't know how I'd ever got along when I couldn't walk. But God has fergive me now, and I feel like another woman."

"I'll go back with you, Mis' Gray," faltered Rosa, "if you want me to."

"No, my child, you promised to stay with me," interrupted the doctor, "but you may visit Mrs. Gray every week, and I shall see that she never wants for anything again."

[Pg 114]



Dr. Dale and Rosa.

[Pg 116]"Ain't He a wonderful Saviour?" said Mrs. Gray, brightening up. "I can't see how 'tis, but I love them all over there on Burton street now, and I used to be that ugly they're all afraid of me, I know. Seems like I can hardly wait till mornin', I'm that anxious to git back to tell them all about it. They're all so poor, and have sech heavy loads. They need Him bad to help them, but they don't know He's promised to. And Billy Bruce, the poor laddie, I want to tell him how sorry I am fer a-tryin' to throw that piece of coal at him. His ma's drunk most of the time, and so's his pa. He used to come to me fer somethin' to eat, and I wouldn't give him a thing, but jest scold him and tell him to git out of the way, fer I didn't feed beggars. He ain't never had no chance yet, and I'm jest a-goin' to see what I can do fer him. He's got a good heart, and once he told me I'd never lick Rosa if he wuz only a little bigger. He'll run when he see me a-comin', but I'll put some peppermints in my pocket, and mebbe they'd help catch him."

"Oh, Mrs. Gray," said Esther, "I am so glad that you are going to help Billy. I saw him the other day, and feel sure that you can bring him around all right. I shall come over often to assist you, and I know that many will find the same dear Friend in whom you are rejoicing tonight."

[Pg 117]"How wonderfully has the Lord's hand been guiding since first I saw Rosa that cold December day; and the end is not yet!"

For several minutes the little company sat in silence, each one buried in thoughts too deep and sacred to find expression in words.

Presently Rosa lifted her head from the doctor's shoulder, her lustrous eyes becoming more luminous than ever, as she said:

"Oh, how glad I am that I have found the way to the beautiful land! Mother's there, and don't cough no more. Grandpa's there, and we're all going some day, 'cause Jesus paid the fare a long time ago!"

AFTERWORD.

One bitterly cold December day, while riding in a streetcar in a large city, a frail-looking little girl, bending beneath the weight of a huge package, entered the car, sitting directly in front of me. She was thinly, though neatly, clad. Her pale face was overshadowed by an expression of care far too old for her baby shoulders, while her eyes were large, dark, and pathetically wistful.

There was something irresistible about her whole appearance, impelling me to cross the aisle and sit down by her side.

She told me that her name was Rosa, and the conversation which followed, suggested the story, "ROSA'S QUEST."

I asked her if she knew anything about Jesus. To this she replied:

"Not much, ma'am, but it seems like I've heard just a little."

Of heaven and the way of salvation she was as ignorant as a child in the wilds of Africa. The sad expression of her face did not alter till I quoted John 3:16, then looking up with a smile she said:

"Ain't that pretty?"

[Pg 119]For some time we talked, her hungry soul eagerly drinking in the old, old story, but to her so new.

Suddenly she left the car, and with a sense of deep depression, I saw her disappear amid a great, seething mass of humanity.

If she has not succumbed to the hardships of poverty, she probably is still toiling on in that proud "Christian" city, and has any one taught her more of Jesus than she knew that day?

Who will be responsible for these lost souls, constantly coming into contact with those who profess to know the Lord?

Why is it that so many Christians view life from an inverted standpoint, attaching apparently vastly more importance to the few brief years spent upon this earth, than to the countless cycles

of eternity? Why not view it normally, making our one business that of serving that blessed Christ?

Surely the saddest word in a Christian's vocabulary is indifference. By-and-by many a one would doubtless gladly forfeit ten thousand years of heavenly bliss just to recall the wasted opportunities of this day.

It is an incomparable privilege to be a child of the King, and the only way in which one may prove his appreciation and loyalty is by the degree of consecration and quality of service rendered.

[Pg 120]At the day of Christ's appearing there will be many an unrewarded Christian, saved eternally by the precious blood of God's sacrificial Lamb, but with no glittering starry crown to cast at those once-pierced and bleeding feet!

If the reading of this little story draws any nearer to the Lord, influencing them to become more diligent in their search for the lost, it shall accomplish that whereunto it is prayerfully sent.

MAN'S QUESTIONS; GOD'S ANSWERS

Am I accountable to God?

"Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

Has God seen all my ways?

"All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

Does He charge me with sin?

"The Scripture hath concluded all under sin" (Galatians 3:22). "All have sinned" (Romans 3:23).

Will He punish sin?

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4).

"For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Must I perish?

"God is not willing that any perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

How can I escape?

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Is He *able* to save me?

"He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25).

Is He willing?

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Am I saved on believing?

"He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life" (John 3:36).

Can I be saved now?

"*Now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

As I am?

"Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Shall I not fall away?

"Him that is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24).

If saved, how should I live?

"They which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them" (2 Corinthians 5:25).

What about death, and eternity?

"I go to prepare a place for you; that *where I am*, there ye may be also" (John 14:2, 3).

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