

The Family Circle.

For the American Presbyterian.

MY MISSION.

Some few fair flowers I fain would cherish, Which smile in beauty round my way; I would not let their sweetness perish, Nor see their opening buds decay.

THE MINISTER'S WIDOW AND THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

[COMMUNICATED.]

CHAPTER III.

The diary about this time is resumed in its old character.

"To-day, Mrs. Hoopes came in just after church. On Sunday with very little trouble, I always manage to have a nice dinner for Frank. This is done by cooking the meat, and preparing the dessert on Saturday. I asked Mrs. Hoopes to stay, which she did. As we sat down to table, she exclaimed—'Why Mrs. Roby! it isn't possible that you cooked this dinner to-day!'

"Well," she said, "my dear lost Edward never could eat a warm dinner on the Sabbath. It was one of his peculiarities (virtues I suppose she meant) and perhaps his example has made me more sensitive on that point than I would have been otherwise."

"Really I can't help it, but I am beginning to feel very disagreeably towards her. She seems, as my old nurse would say, to have a very 'aggravatin' way' about her. I only wish she would stop dropping in so unexpectedly."

"This morning I went out to pay some calls. I had been confined to the house for nearly two weeks with a bad cold. Somehow or other, hardly any one came so me. I felt rather hurt, I confess, but said nothing to Frank about it. He has been very busy of late and, as I was compelled to go to bed, I suppose he did not notice the absence of visitors. But this morning I thought perhaps the reason would be found. The first place to which I went, was Mrs. Niblack's. She has been one of my warmest friends. The first thing said was—I am come to give you a good scolding. Why have you not been to see me this while?"

"She answered, politely but rather coldly, that she had been very busy for some time past, and had not been out much. The conversation was interrupted here by the entrance of her little Freddy, who managed to engross the greatest share of the conversation during the rest of my stay. All the time I was there, I felt as if something was wrong, and after I left, I could have taken a good cry."

"The next call was only a repetition of my experience at Mrs. Niblack's. By the time I reached my old friend, Mrs. Matlack, the tears could be kept back no longer."

"My dear child! What is the matter?" she exclaimed.

"But I could answer only in broken words. She would not let me talk, but made me take off my things, bathe my face and lie down a while."

"Afterwards I told her all. It was such a relief to tell it. She has such a quiet, serene way about her, that her very manner soothes one. It is like passing a cool, soft hand over a hot aching brow. 'My poor child,' she said, when I had finished, 'I have been fearing something of this kind. You must have noticed that before your cold came, Mrs. Hoopes visited you much oftener than formerly. What was her object I do not know, but I am sorry to say that those visits have done you a great deal of harm.'"

"Why How?" I broke in, "I always treated her politely—but then I broke off confusedly, for I remembered telling you, dear diary, some things not very polite about her. Without noticing my confusion, the old lady went on to tell me, that Mrs. Hoopes had said, that she thought the reason the congregation had to pay Mr. Roby such a high salary, was owing in great measure to his wife's bad management; that I destroyed the parlor furniture, by using that room for a kitchen, was very wasteful in my cooking, and dressed myself and my baby entirely too fine for a minister's wife. That she had attempted to advise me in a friendly way, but I had resented it so haughtily, that her feelings were very much hurt."

"All the way home I thought and thought, whether it would be best to tell Frank, or not. At last I came to the conclusion that it would not do to trouble him about it, and that I would let the matter die a natural death. Mrs. Matlack had tried to persuade me to forgive and forget, and to endeavor to conciliate Mrs. Hoopes. The two former, I said to myself, I will try to do, but as for conciliating Mrs. Hoopes, I think it is I who should be conciliated. Indeed, I do not feel that it is at all my place to make the first advance towards renewed intercourse with any of my quondam friends."

If they choose to take offense when none was given, or intended, it is their own affair, and they may get pleased again."

So wrote Mrs. Roby in her indignation. Not more than two months afterwards, she might have been seen in company with Mrs. Hoopes and Mrs. Niblack, laboring with anxious souls in an inquiry-meeting and on the evening of the same day, holding a prayer-meeting with the same ladies, in behalf of those, with whom they had labored in the morning. How it came to pass the last extract we take from her one confidant will tell:

"Oh what a weary time I have had! In M— too, where I expected to be so happy. You know, I told you, dear friend, that I was going to stand on my dignity with Mrs. Hoopes and her clique. I tried it for a while, but I believe I was not born to be dignified. But what made me more miserable than anything else, was the feeling of coldness and deadness that came over my religious life. Mrs. Hoopes seemed like a clog, upon every holy exercise. And not over me alone, but over others in the church the same unhappy influence seemed to reign. We had been looking for a revival, but it seemed to have passed by us. While other churches had been blessed, ours still was barren and unfruitful. How miserable I felt! Sometimes when I thought of the way in which I had been treated by Mrs. Hoopes, my cheeks would burn and pride would whisper, never stoop to win her. Again, I would think that perhaps she did not intend the mischief which she had wrought, and the knowledge of her desolate widowhood would fill me with reproachful thoughts."

"I am thankful that I was not left to decide the matter myself. Last Sunday Frank, preached a sermon from the text: 'If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone, &c.'"

"Perhaps it was because I stood in special need of such a sermon, that every word seemed meant for me. One thing that he said revealed my own condition, like a flash of light. 'Christians,' said he, 'when offended by something in the conduct of a fellow-disciple, by indulging a spirit of pride and offended dignity, instead of doing as our text directs, often stand in the way of sinners. For not only does the world take particular notice of all disagreement between the professed disciples of Christ but Christians cannot work heartily for the Master when they nourish bitter feelings among themselves.'"

"After this I could hesitate no longer. That very day I went to see Mrs. Hoopes, and we had a long talk together. I found that my task was easier than I had anticipated. She too had been touched by the sermon, and so we followed the counsel of St. James. We confessed our faults one to another, and prayed for each other. When we parted, I think we both parted entirely, the one from her envy and the other from her pride. Since that time she has tried earnestly to undo the evil she had done me, and has succeeded in bringing my old friends back to me."

"When it was all over, I felt so happy that I could not help telling Frank all about it, and the good his sermon did me. He said in his reverend way: 'It is the Lord's doings—it is marvellous in our eyes. I had intended to preach on an entirely different subject, when one of those incidents so wrongly attributed to chance, fixed that text in my mind, and I could not get rid of the impression that I ought to write upon it.'"

"But best of all, dear diary, the revival we looked and prayed for came. I never remember a season like it. It seemed that the kingdom of heaven would be taken by force. I am so glad that our enmity was healed, so that we could work together for Christ. Perhaps our estrangement stayed the blessing. Who can tell?"

THE ANT-LION.

I was going into a deep forest alone on foot, with my blanket, and food, and cooking utensils on my back. The day was very hot, and the road seemed very lonely and long. Just before plunging into the woods, I passed over a piece of land which some hunter's fire had burned over. Nothing was left but here and there a tall stump of a tree, blackened by the fire, and entirely dead, and now and then a great rock which had its covering all burned off, and which was left to be bleached in the sun, and to be pelted by the storms. Under the shadow of one of these huge rocks I sat down to rest. Every bird was still, and every leaf hung motionless on the trees, and the only sound to be heard was the murmur of a distant waterfall far away in the forest."

"I am now," I said to myself, "beyond the reach of men, and almost beyond animal life: I can't see a living thing moving: this is solitude!"

Just then I noticed something that caused the sand to fly up from the middle of my foot-path; and looking carefully at it, I soon satisfied myself what it was. It was a small insect that had burrowed down in the sand, and with his tail or some other apparatus (I could not see what) he was throwing up the sand fast and thick. How it flew! In a few minutes he had made for himself a hole about the size and depth of a large coffee-cup. It was shaped very much like a coffee-cup, as nearly so as the dry sand would take that shape. The sand was dry in a few moments, and of course would very readily roll down into the centre. I had read of the creature, but had never seen one before. He was a little dark-looking fellow; and now he put himself in the very centre of his den, and pushing himself into the sand, there was nothing to be seen but a little black horn, as it appeared to be, sticking out in sight. It looked as if it might be the point of a small rusty needle. This was the ant-lion, and that was his den."

After the sand was dry, and while the hunter was still buried in the sand, I had a

specimen of his skill and power. A little red ant came running along, seeking food for herself and her young. So she climbed up on the rim of this sandy cup, and peeped over to see if she could see anything. Presently she seemed to suspect danger, and tried to scramble off. Alas! it was too late; the sands rolled under her feet, and down she went to the bottom; when in an instant that little black horn opened like a pair of shears, and "clip," and the poor ant had one leg cut off! Now she saw her danger, and struggled to mount up the sides. The lion did not move or show himself. He knew what he was about. And now the poor thing struggled to climb up; but one leg is gone, and she finds it hard work. But she has got almost to the top and almost out, when the sands slip, and down she rolls again to the bottom. "Clip" go the shears, and a second leg is gone."

She now seems terrified beyond measure, and struggles hard; but she gets up but a little way before she slips again, and another leg is off. She now gives up the struggle, and the lion devours her in a few minutes; and then, with a snap of his tail or paddle, throws the skin of the ant entirely out of the cup, and the trap is now set for another. A fly crept down to see what was smelling so good there; and again "clip," and his wing was off! and he was a second course of the dinner. I found several more such dens, and around them lay the skins of the dead, but the inside looked clean and innocent. There was no lion to be seen, but the destroyer is there! The dead are shoved out of sight."

O, ant-lion! you are a preacher to me. I now see how it is that our young men, as they walk over sandy places, have their feet slide. They go into the hotel. It is all fair and inviting. They take a glass of drink; and "clip," they are crippled. They will soon roll back and take another, every time the destroyer cutting off their power to escape. They go to places of sin, and know not that the dead are there! Ah! every fall makes the next easier, and the probability of escape less and less."

I see how it is with our children. They go into the street, they fall into bad company, and every profane word they hear, every improper word they use, every indelicate thought they allow, is like having a leg cut off; they go feebly, and can hardly escape ruin."

O, ant-lion! I wish all our children could see thee, so cunning for mischief, so cruel to thy victims, so much like that great lion, the wicked one, who seeketh "whom he may devour."—Rev. Dr. Todd.

HAPPY IN JESUS.

"To whom, Lord, should I go, To be upheld and blest, Thine are all souls below, Mine with the rest."

"Will you come with me to see Catherine Curtis?" I said to our young pastor, a few weeks since, as we came out of church together at the close of the afternoon service. He cordially assented, and we were soon in the street where she lived."

It was in the rear, through a long alley and up one pair of stairs. The room was small, perhaps 6 feet by 9, and opening out of it was another about half the size. She was the only child of her mother, and she was a widow, and these were the apartments they occupied."

Her mother worked out, and Catherine had learned a trade, but her days of work were now over, for fell consumption had marked her for its victim. The room, though small, was scrupulously clean, and everything about it indicated that they had seen better days."

John Curtis, Catherine's father, had been a pilot, and a man who had no sense of personal danger. In the spring of 1852, at the risk of his life, he and others with him rescued the passengers of a sinking schooner off Montauk Point. For this he received a silver medal—still in the possession of his widow—from a benevolent society in Massachusetts. Only a few months after this, when out at sea, on his perilous mission as a pilot, one dark night between nine and ten, their boat struck a floating wreck, and began at once to fill. The pilots and the sailors took to the small boats. It was very rough at the time, and the one in which were Mr. Curtis and three others got into the trough of the sea and was swamped. Her four passengers found a watery grave. A handsome monument to their memory may now be seen in Greenwood Cemetery."

But to return to Catherine. Our pastor seated himself by her side, and, taking her thin hand in his, said:

"Catherine, you love Jesus?" "O yes," was the answer, "I can never love him enough."

Some kind words followed, some precious verses of Scripture and an appropriate hymn; then he asked:

"Are you happy, Catherine?" "O yes," was her cordial reply, "I never was so happy in my life as I am now."

"Have you no doubt at all?" he inquired. "None," was the peaceful answer.

The faithful pastor, anxious to relieve any difficulty that might vex the dying disciple, said:

"Well, Catherine, is there nothing that troubles you?"

"But one thing," she said, softly, "that I have done nothing, and now can do nothing for Jesus."

She well knew how much Jesus had done for her, and she was anxious to testify her love and gratitude. Her pastor pointed out to her that there was a service of suffering as well as one of active exertion, and that many glorified the Lord in the fires. He assured her that her patience and her hope had been a blessing to

us all, and thus he comforted the dying child of God.

Here was a woman in the very morning of life, only twenty-three, with prospect of death just before her, and no complaints or regrets, no murmurs, no fears, but happy in Jesus.

She had been gradually sinking for many months, and during that time her mother, to whom she was devotedly attached, was brought to a knowledge of the truth, and the two, the mother and the daughter, were permitted to sit down together at the Table of the Lord. Greatly harrassed as she was with her cough, there was, perhaps, no happier child of God at that table than Catherine.

Some time after this, when finding herself sinking, she said one day to a friend, "The great desire of my heart has been granted; God has permitted me to see my mother a Christian, and now I am satisfied to go and be with Him."

Her mother had to be out, a great deal at work, and so Catherine was much alone, but she was always happy. A kind friend, who visited her very frequently, and read to her when she was too feeble to read to herself, testifies that she had no doubts or fears, thus illustrating the beautiful words of Isaiah, "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusted in Thee."

Neither mother nor daughter ever sought pecuniary aid from any one, yet the words of the Lord in the mouth of the Psalmist, in their case, were fully realized: "I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." On one occasion their bedstead broke down, and, being worn out, could not be put up again. The mother knew that her sick daughter could not sleep on the floor, and yet she had no means to buy another. Here was an opportunity to venture on the Lord, and she did it. Money had been laid aside for the rent, soon due, and she said to her daughter, "I will take this and trust to the Lord to make it good." She did so. It was near the end of the week, and on the Sabbath the Lord put it into the heart of a Christian lady (who knew nothing of the foregoing circumstance,) to hand a friend of Catherine ten dollars for her use. The latter, instead of waiting till she could visit her, slipped it quietly into Catherine's hand as she was coming out of church, for though very feeble she had been at the house of God. It was one of the last times that she was in the earthly courts of the Lord. This sum was more than sufficient to pay for the bedstead. Nothing was said, for her heart was too full; but, at the lady's next visit, Catherine told her the whole story, and how good the Lord had been. Nor did she forget her gratitude to the instrument He had used in bestowing His goodness. A Christian physician faithfully ministered to her gratuitously, and did much, by his skill, to ease her pain, while his prayers and kindly words of Christian cheer comforted her soul. Even little children found the chamber of this dying saint an attractive place, and their little hands delighted to minister to her wants. She was a monument of Jesus' grace to a dying Christian."

The day before Thanksgiving it was evident her end was near. She said to her mother early that morning, "I am going home; I will soon be with Jesus." Up to this time she had enjoyed perfect peace. The adversary, despairing of success, had left her alone. But his time was now short and his malignity inveterate, so in this last day, her day of bodily weakness, she was sorely tempted. She would cry in a firm clear voice, "Go away, you cannot have me. He is my Saviour, my all!" "O come, Jesus, I want to go home, home!" At another time she said, "I cannot see Him, but He is here." Then looking up, she said, "O, my Jesus, how I love you!" At last she became perfectly quiet, unable to speak, but apparently recognizing her mother. The next morning, between six and seven, her soul was borne by angels to that Jesus whom she loved so well.

There was just eight of us at the funeral in that little room, but a more impressive and solemn service I never attended. A lady-friend had presented her, some weeks before her death, with a "Silent Comforter"—texts of Scripture, in large print, for every day of the month. It hung on the wall, just by the head of the coffin, and was turned to that day in the month, the 30th. Strange to say the following were the words, so appropriate to the occasion:

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." Isaiah lxi. 10.

"After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

With the mother and another friend I had the privilege of following what had once been the habitation of this now glorified saint to its last earthly resting place in Greenwood Cemetery. There in that beautiful "City of the Dead," just before sunset, we laid her away in the blessed hope of a glorious resurrection—when "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting; you make your burden heavy by struggling under it.

ABSOLVO TE.

One Priest alone can pardon me, Or bid me "Go in peace;" Can breathe that word, "Absolve te," And make these heart-throbs cease. My soul has heard his priestly voice: It said, "I bore thy sins—rejoice!"

He showed the spear-mark in His side, The nail-print on His palm; Said, "Look on me, the Crucified; Why tremblest thou? Be calm! All power is mine—I set thee free— Be not afraid—Absolve te."

In chains of sin once tied and bound, I walk in life and light; Each spot I tread is hallowed ground, Whist Him I keep in sight. Who died a Victim on the tree, That He might say, "Absolve te."

He robbed me in a priestly dress, That I might incense bring; Of prayer, and praise, and righteousness. To Heaven's Eternal King; And when He gave this robe to me, He smiled and said, "Absolve te."

In Heaven He stands before the throne, The Great High Priest above; "MELCHIZEDEK"—that name alone Can sin's dark stain remove. To Him I look on bended knee, And hear that sweet "Absolve te."

A girded Levite here below, I willing service bring; And fain would tell to all I know Of Christ, the priestly King; Would wo all hearts from sin to flee, And hear Him say, "Absolve te."

"A little while," and He shall come Forth from "the inner shrine;" To call His pardoned brethren home: O bliss supreme, divine! When every blood-bought child shall see The Priest who said, "Absolve te."

LAST HOURS OF SIR PHILLIP SIDNEY.

The following beautiful account of the last hours of the accomplished Sidney was written by his Chaplain, and is preserved in the British Museum. He was fatally wounded at the battle of Zutphen, while heroically fighting for the persecuted Netherlands:

"The night before he died, towards the morning, I asked him how he did. He answered, 'I feel myself some weak.' 'I trust,' said I, 'you are well and thoroughly prepared for death if God shall call you.' At this he made a little pause—and then he answered, 'I have a doubt; pray resolve me in it. I have not slept this night; I have earnestly and humbly besought the Lord to give me some sleep; He hath denied it; this causeth me to doubt that God doth not regard me, nor hear any of my prayers; this doth trouble me.' Answer was made, that for matters touching our salvation, or pardon of our sins through Christ, He gave an absolute promise; but, for things concerning this life, God hath promised them but with caution; that which he hath absolutely promised we may assuredly look to receive, craving in faith that which He hath thus promised. 'I am,' said he, 'fully satisfied and resolved with this answer. No doubt it is even so; then I will submit myself to His will in these outward things.' He added farther, 'I had this night a trouble in my mynd; for, searching myself, methought I had not a full and sure hold on Christ. After I had continued in this perplexity awhile, how strangely God did deliver me! There came to my remembrance a vanity in which I delighted, whereof I had not rid myself. I rid myself of it, and presently my joye and comfort returned.' Within a few hours after, I told that I thought his death did approach, which, indeed, he well perceived, and for which he prepared himself. His fear that death would take away his understanding did continue. 'I doe,' said he, 'with trembling hart, most humble intreat the Lord that the pangs of death may not be so grievous as to take away my understanding.'"

"It was proved to him, by testimonies and infallible reasons out of the Scriptures, that, although his understanding and senses should fail, yet that faith which he had now could not fail, but would hold still the power and victory before God. At this, he did, with a cheerful and smiling countenance, put forth his hand, and slapt me softly on the cheeks. Not long after, he lifted up his eyes and hands, uttering these words, 'I would not change my joye for the empire of the world;' for the nearer he saw death approach, the more his comfort seemed to increase. As the light of a lamp is continued by pouring in of oyl, so he sought to have the burning zeal and flame of his prayer, upon which his heart was still bent, cherished by the comforts of the holy Word; accounting it a great injury if we did not seek to give wings to his faith to carry up his prayers speedily, uttering grief when he felt any thought interrupting him."

"Having made a comparison of God's grace now in him, his former virtues seemed to be nothing; for he wholly condemned his former life. 'All things in it,' said he, 'have been vaine, vaine, vaine.'"

"It now seemed as if all natural heat and life were almost utterly gone out of him, that his understanding had failed, and that it was to no purpose to speak any more unto him. But it was far otherwise. I spake thus unto him: 'Sir, if you hear what I saye, let us by some means know it, and if you have still your inward joye and consolation in God, hold up your hand.' With that he did lift up his hand, and stretched it forth on high, which we though he could scarce have moved, and it caused the beholders to cry out with joye, that his understanding should be still so perfect, and that the weak body, beyond all explanation, should so readily give a sign of the joye of the soul. After this, asking him to lift up his hands to God, seeing he could not speak or open his eyes—that we might see his heart still prayed, he raised both his hands, and set them together on his breast, and held them upwards, after the manner of those which make humble petitions; and so his hands did remain, and even so stiff, that would have so continued standing, but that we took the one from the other."