

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

BY MARY BASKIN.

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"A little child shall lead them." These words have been singing themselves into my heart all through the live-long day; sometimes sweetly, and in a low, minor key; again, in grand triumphant song—"A little child shall lead them."

Visions have come with the notes, for women are ever dreamers—some more, some less, but none quite free from the sweet floating life which we call dream-land—so to-day my apathy has landed me upon that quiet shore—quiet now because my passion of suffering has been lulled to sleep in the arms of love.

A "little child." Oh, my wee, dainty darling! My little one, with her childish graces and merry laughter! My own ewe lamb of bewitching, coaxing ways and tiny petulances; my sunbeam, who eased my passionate, aching heart! I sit here alone to-day, and hear the world, afar off in its din, speaking my name as a household word, with tenderness and affection; yet I yearn over my heart that was once so empty, so hungry!

Yes, "hungry!" See! What is fame to a woman? A crown of thorns to pierce her bleeding brow. What is love? An amulet which she can wear about her heart as a shield against the bitterness of life, and the intoxicating, bewildering sweetness of the entrance to its resting-place which we call death—albeit God calleth it by a better name, for His, beloved only "fall on sleep."

"A little child shall lead them." Be quiet, heart! Where? Into the green pastures, starred with ever-living aspens; into the garden where groweth the Tree of Life; where purls the rippling of the waters which wash their golden sands near the great white throne of the Father—the glad river which shimmers in the light of a land of greetings instead of partings. Ah! there is the sting of this life—the partings!

My baby, what would I give for one kiss from your rose-bud mouth; one "nice mamma" from your little warbling voice! Oh, my birdie, when the angels sang you to sleep in their arms did they know a mother's heart was left empty of her child?

Such an emptiness! One too great for tears. Too dark for aught but passionate outcries, or a wringing of cold hands in sorrow; while the heart still empty and void, beats on, and will not cease from its strife of grief and pain.

"Such a hungry little heart," he used to say, while his eyes grew luminous with a great and unquenchable love, and I nestled to his to appease the desire of my own.

When I speak to you, my sisters, even you, who have called me "still and proud," is not this craving for love which grows in the heart of a woman only the continuance of the old serial story which was read in the palace of the great king, when the Christ of this world left the regal courts for the satisfaction of hearts which hungered, yet had no living bread?

The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep, and good-bye to the world and its moaning. are words fitted for application in; other homes than those of the brave fisherman's wives who watch by the corpses laid out on the strand. There are corpses of hopes more pitiful than those of men! But I must on to my story. What has this to do with "a little child?"

Gay, giddy, thoughtless and young, I married early. My girlhood had not blossomed into womanhood, ere I knew the joys of a wife and mother. Oh, twofold glory, the truest, fairest crown of Heaven's own bestowal! Even after the lapse of all these dreary years I cannot write fully of the time when my heart first awoke at the touch of love. It was as if I had been slumbering in some sweet enchanted bower where the realities of life had never planted a foot, until I answered to the magic touch, and the sleep fled beyond recall. Do I regret the awakening? That question I would fain evade, for with my love, I have also won sorrow's crown of sorrow; the remembrance of happier things!

Ah me! I found my love too great for my life, so I made it an idol, exalted, then worshipped hourly at its shrine—a shrine of my own erecting. Idolatry of the basest sort, for I never once owned the hand which had held the gift for my acceptance.

Then its object was withdrawn, while in the bitterness of my heart I cursed God as women can curse even while they keep lip-silence. My unspoken moan was "God has robbed me."

Sweet Heaven, as if He had done ought but claim His own!

Darkness followed. Insensibility drew her veil over so pitiful a scene; then a

The bar. Kingsley.

comforter nestled in my bosom, and I grew calmer. Only, at times, a vague unrest would steal over me, while I murmured, with quickening breath, "If God should rob me again!"

The years passed, and I grew confident. Again I learnt to laugh; my tears grew fewer, my smiles more abundant, for the innocent baby prattle was like the trilling of an Aeolian harp, so sweet, so dear, so ravishing.

My April flower! Mothers, with dimpled darlings upon your knees, do you know what it was to me to feel my baby's arms "hugging" me in the infantine delight of a child who knows nothing of any other life but a mother's love?

"Nice mamma," and the little bundle of tumbled curls would play bo-peep in and out of my lap a hundred times a day. Yet I, who had only one, was destined to be written childless.

Only for a little while, though. My fairy's wings are growing in a land where there can be no climbing higher, and therefore no bereavement used as an incentive to make our tired souls climb and strain after the summit which towers so high above our weary eyes.

One sweet June day, my baby sitting in the strawberry-bed—with two sunburnt little fists rubbing out two sleepy eyes, and making delicious cooing music to the soft humming of the bees—I watching her as we women all watch things that we love—my heart sang a "Magnificat" of its own, but not unto the Lord. Did I not love Him a little in return for His gift? I do not know. I am inclined to the thought that my actions were pure because I was so quietly happy; and whatever philosophers may say respecting trials bringing purity and peace, I only, in my weak humanity, knew that it was so easy to be good when I had no sorrow but a lullied one, and no cause for a present grief.

Little did I think how vividly I should ever after remember the picture in consequence of the day becoming a red-letter one in my history.

With the sunlight dancing as of old, the birds singing as though no nests of theirs were robbed, I opened a letter which had been brought to me, and read—"May I come to you, dear? When your husband died I marvelled at the force of your grief. Now every throbe of agony you endure finds its echo in my heart. But I try to say, 'Why will be done.' My boys are at home, my comfort and my care. I want them to see again their father's home and his old church. I want more, dear; I think if I could lay my head upon your heart, tears would come to ease the aching of my own. Shall I be welcome?"

As if such a question needed to be asked! Was she not the only woman whose hand had touched my grief with healing fingers? Memory flew back. I saw the manly yet rugged face of her husband, as he preached in the dear old kirk those truths which afterward smoothed his own dying bed, so I wrote—"Come, come, and come quickly."

Four months before I had received the news of her husband's death, and had mourned for the ambassador of Christ who had died amidst the populace of a large city, his eyes growing dim and tender with joy at the sight of the green fields stretching far away in the distance, where no inhabitant can say, "I am sick."

So they came. A pale, faded woman, with a sweet, hushed look upon her face, as if the misery of suffering had stilled her heart into an abiding quietude. Two sturdy, handsome lads, who made my house a very bye-word for noise and mirth, yet loved my child—my Beatrice—as sisterless lads oft-times love girls younger and more helpless than themselves, while she—ah! she almost made me jealous of her love for them.

Do they play now, as Luther's dream-children played, in the gardens of God? Do they laugh the same ringing tones and jubilantly shout over new treasures as they did here? Oh, my heart! and I not there to hear them!

The weeks flew by, grew into months, passed into a year, and still they stayed with me, for would not my home have been very lone if they had left at? I had no relations to gainsay my decision, so it became a tacitly understood, though unspoken, thing between us, that we should all live together.

I want to dwell on that time—it was so fresh, so fair, so glad! As all earthly things that are "fresh, fair and glad" fade, so it faded, for the lights of it went out in obscure darkness.

The eldest boy came in one day flushed and heated, declaring he could "not play out of doors any longer, 'twas so hot."

So the three sat in the cool shadiness of the nursery, while my friend and I worked or talked away the hours, with never a thought of the dark shadow that had entered with the children, to grow and expand until it shook its gloom over

the whole house, causing it to rain tears and lamentations.

My friend had been reading some of those noble, womanly, yet enthusiastic outbursts of Mrs. Browning's. Well do I remember the tenderness with which she dwelt upon the lines—

"God gives patience, love learns strength. And faith remembers promise; And hope itself can smile at length On other hopes gone from us."

I answered her pathos with a strange quivering, which I could not restrain, "Love only learns strength, Nellie, when it has other hopes behind the one which has fled."

If she had seen the face of her dead husband smiling down upon her, she could not have looked more lovely as she responded, "Love learns strength to live so that we may again meet the hopes which have gone from us, for I believe that we shall yet stand face to face with the living abiding beauty of each thing which we have called dead. Surely if our bodies rise again, our hopes also shall have resurrection."

"Yet I could not smile if God took all, God grant He never may!" I cried. "Amen!" she breathed, with a pure solemnity which comforted my strange forebodings of evil.

Could I have foreseen what was to follow? "While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept" have a strange significance for me. Who could fast or sleep when Death has looked into the dear eyes we love? Tears will not come.

"No use sending them away now, my dear madam, the mischief is done," was the doctor's verdict when Charlie's heat and weariness grew into fever. The "them" referred to Archie and my baby Trixie, or as I always called her now "my own little girl!"

"I see not o'er're baby now, mamma, I co're 'ild," she would lip, and I would gather her into my arms with soft kissed and murmured blessings for I loved her fiercely and passionately, often thinking of my husband's words, "poor hungry heart."

If I had eaten of the bread of life my cravings might have been appeased, but I wanted to satisfy them in my own way. God would not have it so, yet he came in 'the pain. Archie sickened the next day, and Trixie also, but "childish ailments," I whispered to my perplexed heart, "She cannot, cannot die!"

Then the blinds were drawn, for the voice of Charlie's angel was heard calling to him, and another night of woe dawned for the mother. Again an angel broke the stillness of the house and Archie's bird-like voice made one more in heaven's choir, while I—God forgive me—forgot their mother's pain in my own; watching until I grew desperate in my forebodings, darning God to tike my child. Do you know the stillness of a darkened house where the children are not! Do you comprehend the aching when no voice comes to ease the mourner's pain; if so, pity their mother, for I spoke no word of sympathy; my heart was bound up in that of my child, and she—was dying.

I refused to believe it at first, calling the doctor a madman, then grew cold as a stone while I resumed my watch at the child's couch. Dying! and only six days ago she had been filling her hand with sweet roses, herself the sweetest among them all! I think I shall never forget my injustice and wickedness of the miserable days that followed. "Why did you bring your boys here," I cried, "They have killed my darling!" then with the insanity of uncontrolled sorrow bursting into a moan, I kept up my cry, "shall not die." Oh impotency of mortals! with all my love she burst aside its chord and left me. I was glad to see the body still once more, its feeble fluttering quite over, for she suffered so. "Oh my darling, my darling!"

"Trixie doing to Archie, mamma tum too," she said, as if she knew that Archie's body was lying lifeless in the other room. "Stay with me my darling, my love, my own precious, precious Trixie," I cried in despairing, heart-broken sorrow. "Me want Archie."

"Not mamma! See how mamma wants her bird." "Mamma's bird fly, Mamma tum too." "Tum too!" the little lips framed once more, and then the wings had grown for an angel's soaring and the bird had flown indeed.

I am coming, my baby, when God so freely, so coming to you. My pretty pale darling nestled a little white rose among the fairest ones our garden grew, and then—a child's hand reached through the gloom and led me even unto God.

After she died I wrote my thoughts to comfort other tired hearts; yet while the world sings its praises of the words I write it comments freely upon the "still cold woman" who pens such burning thoughts.

My earthly passions are stilled, and I am cold, outwardly so, because I cannot care even a child without stirring emo-

tions which I fain would stifle. Thank God, with all this, my heart is not hungry now, I know that He has only taken my treasure—

As a mother will try Too costly, though given by herself, Till the room shall be stiller from noise, And the children more fit for such joys, Keep 'er their heads on the shelf."

He has crowned us with the christm of His own love. If any heart-beats are stiller and more passionless they are yet truer and purer. My friend? She still sits by the same fireside, under the old roof. She asked me a question long ago—"Is it well with the child?" and I answered "It is well."

Sometimes I fancy that as I climb heaven's golden stair, a child's face will flash its love-light into mine, while my baby's hand will lead me to the One who lent to me my treasures.

I am mortal, I moan; yet being also spiritual, I rejoice, Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory of immortality!

Again I hear the old notes, sweet and pure as the voice of angels hymning, "A little child shall lead them."

THE BIBLE ON TENTER-HOOKS.

The Rev. Dr. Richard Newton, in the preface to his "Illustrated Ramble in Bible Lands," relates the following anecdote:

In a village in Yorkshire, England, lived two men who were cloth manufacturers. One was named Walsh, the other Stetson. Walsh was an unbeliever. It was a favorite opinion of his that the Bible was "all made up." He could never believe that it was written where it professed to be, and by the men said to have written it. But Stetson was an earnest Christian.

Walsh was part owner of a factory, and one year he had set his heart on making a very large and fine piece of cloth. He took great pains with the carding, spinning, dyeing, weaving and finishing of it. In the process of manufacture it was one day stretched on the tenter-hooks to dry. It made a fine show, and he felt very proud of it. The next morning he arose early to work at it, and to his amazement it was gone. Some one had stolen it during the night.

After weeks of anxiety and expense, a piece of cloth answering the description was stopped at Manchester awaiting the owner and proof. Away to Manchester went Walsh, as fast as the express train could carry him. There he found many rolls of cloth which had been stolen. They were very much alike. He selected one which he felt satisfied was his. But how could he prove it? In doubt and perplexity, he called on his neighbor Stetson.

"Friend Stetson," said he, "I have found a piece of cloth which I am sure is the one which was stolen from me. But how to prove it, is the question. Can you tell me how?"

"You don't want it unless it is really yours?" "Certainly not." "And you want proof that is plain, simple and such as will satisfy yourself and everybody?"

"Precisely so." "Well, then, take Bible proof." "Bible proof! Pray, what is that?"

"Take your cloth to the tenter-hooks on which it was stretched, and if it be yours every hood will just fit the hole, through which it passed before being taken down. These and the holes just come together tight, no other proof will be wanted that the cloth is yours."

"True. Why didn't I think of this before?"

Away he went, and sure enough—every hook came to its little hole, and the cloth was proved to be his. The tenter-hooks were the very best evidence that could be had.

Some days after this Walsh met his friend again.

"I say, Stetson," said he, "what did you mean, the other day, by calling the tenter-hooks 'Bible proof?' I am sure if I had as good evidence for the Bible as I had for my cloth, I never should doubt it again."

"You have the same, only better, for the Bible." "How so?"

"Put it on the tenter-hooks. Take the Bible and travel with it go to the place in which it was made. There you will find the Red Sea, the Jordan, the Lake of Galilee, Mount Lebanon, Hermon, Carmel, Tabor and Gerizim; there

you will find the cities of Damascus, Hebron, Tyre, Sidon and Jerusalem. Every mountain, every river, every sheet of water mentioned in the Bible is there, just as the Bible speaks of it. Sinai and the Desert and the Dead sea are there. The holes and the hooks come together exactly. The best guide book through the country is the Bible. It must have been written on the spot, just as your cloth must have been made and stretched on your tenter-hooks. That land is the mould in which the Bible is cast, and when you bring the land and the book together, they fit to perfection."

Walsh felt the force of this argument, and he gave up his infidelity, and began to read the Bible with an interest he never had felt in it before.

HYMN FOR HEAVEN.

"And they sung a new song." Rev. 5: 9. One of the ministers of Leicester, England, in relating some pleasing incidents in connection with his pastoral work, gives the following:

On visiting one of the courts of the town, I was requested by one of the poor people to call on an old woman who had been bedridden for some years, and who lived in the neighborhood. On reaching the cottage, and finding no response to my knocking at the door, I walked in, and went to the foot of the stairs, when I soon heard a faint voice requesting whoever it was to come up. In a small room at the top there lay an aged but cheerful invalid. I told her that I had been requested to call, and that I was a minister of the gospel. She replied, "Well, then, you are just the visitor I want, and you are come at the right time."

And taking up her hymn-book, which lay upon the bed, said, "Now, I have been searching for a long time to see if I can find a hymn that will do to sing in heaven, and I cannot. Now, can you?" I took the book, and found

"Their is a land of pure delight." "Surely that will do." "Well go on," she said; "read the hymn 'arough.'" Presently I came to

"Death like a narrow sea divides." "Ah," she said, "that wout do." I then mentioned.

"There is a fountain filled with blood." "Go on," she said. I read the last verse—

"Then in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing thy power to save, When this poor lisping, stammering tongue Lies silent in the grave."

"That wout do," she said, smilingly: "mine sha'n't be a poor, lisping, stammering tongue there." I found others, but all to no purpose. "No, no, dear sir, shut the book; their will have to be a new one made." "And they sung a new song."

THE WIDOW VAN COTT AS A PREACHER.

The widow Van Cott gave a descriptive and pantomimic illustration of Moody and Sankey's hymn, "Ninety and Nine," in the West Thirtieth street Methodist meeting house last evening. She looked over the preacher's desk at an imaginary flock of sheep, and personating a shepherd and pointing with her finger, began to count, "One, two, three," etc. Said she, "There are only ninety-nine sheep. There ought to be a hundred. One is missing. Where is it?" The widow looked here and there behind her, in front and to the right and left. Her face expressed and her manner betokened the utmost anxiety. Suddenly she assumed a listening attitude, and said: "I hear the bleating of a sheep far off on the mountain side. It is the last one out of the fold, in the cold and stormy weather. I must go and get it before it perishes with hunger and cold." Then Mrs. Van Cott took a few quick steps as though going after the lost sheep. She stopped and made believe lift the imaginary sheep. Throwing the animal over her shoulder, she marched back across the platform rejoicing that the lost had been found.

She said, "So the Lord rejoices over one sinner saved." Curiosity was again excited by the lady preacher putting her hand in her pocket and withdrawing it with some imaginary silver coins in her palm. She counted them. There were only nine, when there should have been ten. Then in pantomimic she feigned holding a lighted candle and searching on the floor for the lost coin. She mimicked a woman sweeping with a broom. At last the missing piece was found, and the widow's face was radiant with joy. Mrs. Van Cott made the same application to this story that she did to the "Ninety and Nine."—N. Y. Sun.

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