

From the Lady's Book.

THE BLIND GIRL'S STORY.

By Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz.

All is still and solitary—the lamp burns on the table, with wasting splendour. The writing-desk is open before me, with the last letter unfolded—the letter I have cherished so fondly, though every word seems an arrow to my conscience. I cannot solace myself by the act, yet I must give utterance to the feelings with which my heart is bursting. On these unwritten sheets I will breathe my soul—I will trace its early history, and, perchance, his eye may see them when mine are veiled in a darkness deeper than that which once sealed them. Yet what shall I write? How shall I commence? What great events rise up in the records of memory, over which imagination may throw its rich empurpled dyes? Alas! mine is but a record of the heart—but of a blind girl's heart—and that Being who bound my eyes with a fillet of darkness, till the hand of science lifted the thick film, and flooded them with the glories of creation, alone knows the mysteries of the spirit he has made. His eye is upon me at this moment, and as this awful conviction comes over me, a kind of death-like calmness settles on the restless sea of passion. Oh! when I was blind, what was my conception of the All-seeing eye! It seemed to me as if it filled the world with its effulgence. I felt as if I, in my blindness, were placed in that rock where Moses hid, when the glory of the Lord passed by. Would that no daring hand had drawn me from that protecting shade. The beams that enlighten me have withered up the fountains of joy, and though surrounded by light, as with a garment, my soul is wrapped in the gloom of midnight. I was a blind child—blind from my birth—with one brother, older than myself, and a widowed father,—for we were motherless—motherless, sisterless—yet blind. What a world of dependence is expressed in those few words. But, though thus helpless and dependent, I was scarcely conscious of my peculiar claim to sympathy and care.

My father was wealthy, and my childhood was crowned with every indulgence that wealth could purchase, or parental tenderness devise. My brother was devotedly attached to me, giving all his leisure to my amusement—for I was looked upon as hallowed by the misfortune which excluded me from communion with the visible world—and my wishes became laws, and my happiness the paramount object of his household. Heaven, perhaps, as a kind of indemnification for depriving me of one of the wonted blessings of life, moulded me in a form which pleased the fond eyes of my relatives, and, as it was my father's pride to array me in a most graceful and becoming dress, my sightless eyes being constantly covered by a silken screen, I was a happy child. If it had not been for the epithet, *poor*, so often attached to my name, I should never have dreamed that mine was a forlorn destiny. "My poor little blind girl," my father would exclaim, as he took me in his lap, after his return from his business abroad—"My poor little sister," was the constant appellation given me by my affectionate brother, yet I was happy. When he led me in the garden, through the odorous flowers, I felt a kind of aching rapture at the sweetness they exhaled—their soft, velvet texture, was ecstasy to the touch, and the wind-harps that played amid the branches of the trees were like the lyres of angels to my ears. Then the songs of birds, with what thrilling sensations would I listen to these harmonists of nature, these winged minstrels of God's own choir, as they lifted their strains of living harmony in the dim corridors of the woods. They painted to me the beauty of the world, and I believed them—but I could conceive nothing so beautiful as sound. I associated the idea of every thing that was lovely with music. It was my passion, and also my peculiar talent. Every facility which art has furnished to supply the deficiencies of nature was given me, and my progress was considered astonishing by those who are not aware of the power and acuteness of touch bestowed upon the sightless. I love to linger on the days of my childhood, when sunshine flowed in upon my heart in one unclouded stream. The serpent slumbered in the bottom of

the fountain—had no one gone down into its depths, its venom might have slumbered yet. My first cause of sorrow was parting with my brother—"my guide my companion, my familiar friend." He was sent to a distant college, and I felt for a while as if I were alone in the world, for my father was in public life, and it was only at evening he had leisure to indulge in the tenderness of domestic feeling. He had never given up the hope that I might recover my sight. When I was very small there was an operation performed upon my eyes, but it was by an unskilful oculist, and unsuccessful. After this I had an unspeakable dread of any future attempt,—the slightest allusion to the subject threw me into such nervous agitation, my father at last forebore to mention it. "Let me live and die under this shade," I would say, "like the flower that blooms in the cleft of the rock. The sunshine and the dew are not for me." Time glided away. In one year more and Henry would complete his collegiate course. I was in the morning of woman-hood, but my helpless condition preserved to me all the privileges and indulgences of the child. It was at this era—why did I here dash aside my pen, and press my hands upon my temples to still the throbbings of a thousand pulses, starting simultaneously into motion? Why cannot we always be children? Why was I not suffered to remain blind?—A young physician came into the neighbourhood, who had already acquired some fame as an oculist. He visited our family—he became almost identified with our household. Philanthropy guided him in his choice of a profession. He knew himself gifted with extraordinary talents, and that he had it in his power to mitigate the woes of mankind. But though the votary of duty, he was a worshipper at the shrine of intellect and taste. He loved poetry, and, next to music, it was my passion. He read to me the melodious strains of the sons of song, in a voice more eloquent, in its low depth of sweetness, than the minstrels whose harmony he breathed. When I touched the keys of the piano, his voice was raised, in unison with mine. If I wandered in the garden, his hand was ever ready to guide, and his arm to sustain me. He brought me the wild flower of the field, and the exotic of the green-house, and, as he described their hues and outlines, I scarcely regretted the want of vision. Here, in this book, I have pressed each gift. I remember the very words he uttered when he gave me this cluster—"See," said he, "nay, feel this upright stem, so lofty, till bending from the weight of the flower it bears. It is a lily—I plucked it from the margin of a stream, in which it seemed gazing on its white waxen leaves. Touch gently the briars of this wild rose. Thus heaven guards the innocence and beauty that gladdens the eyes of the wayfaring man. Cecilia, would you not like to look upon these flowers?" "Yes, but far rather on the faces of those I love—my father's—my brother's. Man is made in the image of his Maker, and his face must be divine." "Oh!" added I, in the secrecy of my own soul, "how divine must be the features of that friend, who has unfolded to me such unspeakable treasures of genius and feeling, whose companionship seems a foretaste of the felicities of heaven." It was then, for the first time, he dared to suggest to me a hope that my blindness was not incurable. He told me he had been devoting all his leisure to this one subject, and that he was sure he had mastered every difficulty—that though mine was a peculiar case, and had once baffled the efforts of the optician, he dared to assure himself of complete success. "And if I fail," said he "if through my means no light should visit your darkened orbs, then," continued he, with an expression of feeling that seemed wholly irrepressible, "suffer me to be a light to your eye and a lamp to your feet. But if it should be my lot to bestow upon you the most glorious of the gifts of God, to meet from you one glance of gratitude and love, were a recompense I would purchase with life itself." Did I dream? or were these words breathed to me?—me, the helpless, blind girl! to receive the unmeasured devotion of one of the most gifted and interesting of created beings. I had thought that he pitied me, that he felt for me the kindness of a brother, that he found in me some congenial tastes—but that he loved me so entirely, it was a con-

fession as unlooked for as overpowering. My heart ached from the oppression of its joy. Let not the cold-hearted and vain smile, when I repeat the broken accents of gratitude, trust, and love, that fell from my lips. My helplessness sanctified the offer, and I received his pledge of faith as a holy thing, to be kept holy through time and eternity.

Never shall I forget that moment, when the first ray of light penetrated the long midnight that had shrouded my vision. It was in a darkened apartment. My father, one female friend, and Clinton, the beloved physician—these were around me. Faint, dim, and uncertain, as the first gray of the dawn, was that ray, but it was the herald of coming light, and hailed as a day-spring from on high. A bandage was immediately drawn over my brow, but, during the weeks in which I was condemned to remain in darkness, the memory of that dim radiance was ever glimmering round me. There was a figure kneeling, with clasped hands and upraised head, pale and venerable—I knew it was my father's—for the same figure folded me to his heart the next moment, and wept like an infant. There was one with soft flowing outline, and loose robes, by my side,—and bending over me, with eyes gazing down into the mysteries of my being, shadowy, but glorious, was he who received the first glance of the being he had awakened to a new creation. Slowly, gradually was I allowed to emerge from my eclipse, but when I was at last led from my darkened chamber, when I looked abroad on the face of nature, clothed as she was in the magnificent garniture of summer, when I saw the heavens unrolled in their majesty, the sun travelling in the greatness of his strength, the flowers glowing in the beams that enamelled them, I closed my eyes, almost fainting from the excessive glory. I will not attempt to describe my sensations when I first distinctly saw the lineament of my loved Creator contained nothing so lovely to my sight. To see the soul, the thinking, feeling, immortal soul, flashing with enthusiasm, or darkening with tenderness, looking forth from his eyes, and feel my own mingling with his. No one but those who have once been blind, and not see, can imagine the intensity of my emotions. Next to my Creator, I felt my homage was due to him, and sure it is not impious to apply to him the sublime language of Scripture—"He said, let there be light, and there was light."

Our mansion was transformed. My father gathered his friends around him to participate in his joy. My brother was summoned home. There seemed one continual jubilee. I turned coldly, however, from all these festivities, occupied almost exclusively with one feeling,—could not feign an interest in others I did not feel. I began even at this early period to experience the symptoms of that passion, which has since consumed me. Clinton, though still as ever, the kind, devoted, watchful guardian, hovering round my steps, as a shield me from every danger, Clinton, I saw, shared the pleasures of sociality and returned the smiles kindled wherever he moved. He was a universal favorite in society, and knew how to adapt himself to others—not from a vague desire of popularity, but from a benevolence, a sunny glow of feeling, shedding light and warmth all around. Even then there were moments when I regretted my blindness, and wished I had never seen the smiles and glances, which I would fain rivet for ever on myself. Henry, my brother, once whispered to me, "I was turning, in a languid manner, the leaves of a book, not caring to play, because Clinton was not being over my chair, "My dear Cecilia, do not let Clinton see too glaringly his power over you. There is scarcely a man in the world who can be trusted with unlimited power. We are ungrateful creatures, my sweet sister, and do not know us half as well as we know each other. You ought to love Clinton, for he merits it, but be not of yourself. Do not love him too well for his peace of your own." Alas! poor Henry—how little have I heeded your brotherly admonitions? But when did passion listen to the counsels of reason—when will it? What cygnet's down proves a barrier to the tempest's