

## THE FAMILY CIRCLE.

## THE POCKET BIBLE;

OR

"HIS LOVING KINDNESS CHANGES NOT."

(Concluded.)

Four years elapsed, and nothing was heard of Charles Grant. Sometimes during the second year of his absence a rumor reached us that a ship, supposed to be the ———, which sailed from ———, and on board of which Charles was supposed to be, was burned at sea, and that but two or three only of the crew were saved, and that among them was a young man of the name of Grant. But the rumor, though not contradicted, was not confirmed, and another period of uncertainty and anxiety fell to the lot of the long-stricken and heart-saddened mother and sister of the absent boy.

At length the friends of Mrs. Grant were pained to perceive a visible change in her health. The indications of that too fatal malady—consumption, were too apparent to be mistaken. Its approach was indeed slow and insidious, and for a time was kept at bay by the kind and assiduous attention of our village physician; but medical prescription at length lost its power, and she became at first confined to the house—then to her room—and finally to her bed.

I often visited her, as did other friends. Her room was no longer the abode of gloom and sorrow. She had for some months been making progress in resignation to the will of God; and, though her feeble tabernacle was shaken, and was likely to be dissolved through years of anxiety and affliction, yet her faith seemed to acquire more and more strength, and to fasten with a firm hold upon the divine promises.

One day, as I sat conversing with her, she alluded to the faithfulness of God, and expressed her unwavering confidence in Him. She said it had been her desire to acquiesce in the Divine will, and she hoped that she should be able to do so, whatever it might be, in relation to herself or her absent son. But, continued she, I have prayed long and fervently that I may once more see him—see him a true penitent—and I cannot relinquish the belief that God will hear and answer.

I was about to say something which might tend to soothe her, in case her hopes were not realized, as I must confess I saw little present reason to expect they would be; when she stopped me, and observed, "You may think me presumptuous, but my faith must enjoy its hold on the Divine promises. Has not God said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee, and thou shalt glorify me?' I have called—yes, I have called, by day and by night, and God has seemed to help me. Has he excited such strong, such intense emotions for nothing? Has he enabled me to wrestle so with him, only to be disappointed? I am aware that probabilities are all apparently against me. I must soon fail; this heart will soon cease beating, and the narrow house be my resting-place, but I still have confidence in the faithfulness of my heavenly Father. What though I see no immediate prospect of the return of my poor boy, I believe that I shall yet press that child to my bosom. Years since, I wrote in a pocket Bible I gave him, 'His loving-kindness changes not,' and do you think it will fail now?"

I confess I admired the steady faith of the mother—a faith strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; and yet it seemed scarcely possible that her hopes should be realized. At length my faith faltered, for it was apparent that her hour of departure was not far distant.

That night two or three female friends, fearful of her failure before morning, offered to stay with the mother of Alice. This the latter cheerfully assented to, though she had decided not to leave her mother. The necessary arrangements for the night were made, and at an early hour all was silent in and around the humble cottage.

It was a glorious night abroad—clear, soft, mild,—just such a night as a saint might well choose in which to take its departure and soar to the temple above. The poet must have had some such night in vision when he penned those beautiful lines:

"The moon awakes, and from her maiden face  
Shedding her cloudy locks, looks meekly forth.  
And, with her virgin stars, walks in the heavens—  
Walks nightly there, conversing as she walks.  
Of purity, and holiness, and God."

It was just such a night, and Alice had risen from her seat; and to hide her emotions, as her dear parent breathed more heavily, had gone to the window, the curtain of which she drew aside, and was standing leaning her arm on the sash. In the distance, just beyond the gate, she descried, as she thought, the figure of a man who seemed to be approaching. For a moment she started back, but again looked, and his hand was on the latch. The gate was opened with great caution, and the stranger approached slowly towards the house. Presently a gentle knock was heard at the kitchen door. It was impossible for Alice to summon courage to attend to the stranger herself; but she whispered to the nurse, who upon unlocking the door inquired the reason for so late and unseasonable an intrusion.

"Does Mrs. Grant still reside here?" inquired the stranger in a kind but earnest tone.

"She does," replied the nurse; "but she is dangerously ill, and we fear cannot live many hours: you cannot see her."

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed the stranger, and so audible were the words pronounced that the sound fell on the ears of Alice, and her heart beat with strong and distressing emotions.

"I must see her," continued the stranger, "do not deny me, madam, quick—quick!" and he gently pressed open the door, still held by the surprised and even terrified nurse.

Alice listened to the sounds without being able to decide their import; but at length fearing that her mother might be disturbed, she stole softly out of the room for the purpose of ascertaining what the stranger wished.

"Alice—Miss Alice!" said the nurse as she approached.

But before she had finished what she was attempting to say, the stranger inquired, with a countenance wild with emotion, "Is this Alice Grant?" and the next moment he swooned and fell on the floor.

"Miss Alice," exclaimed the agitated nurse, "what does all this mean?—who can this be?—what shall we do?"

Alice herself stood amazed; but as the light fell upon the features of the apparently lifeless stranger, a thought flashed across her mind, and the following moment she was nearly falling beside him.

"Nurse," said she, "softly but quickly hand me some water." This she applied liberally to the temples of the stranger, who slowly recovered his consciousness, and at length sat up. He looked round, and presently fastened his eyes most intently and inquiringly on the pale and motionless Alice. "Yes, yes," he exclaimed, "it is she; it is—it is my own beloved Alice!"

"Charles—Charles—my brother!" uttered Alice, as she fell upon his bosom. "O, heaven be praised! Charles, is it—is it you?—O, mother—mother!"

The sound of voices reached the dying mother, and she inquired, "Alice, my child,—what—what did I hear, Alice?"

Alice, scarcely able to stand, hastened to her bedside, and taking her mother's hand, already cold with death, spoke in accents tremulous—for her whole frame was agitated—tremulous, but kind.

"What did I hear, Alice?" the mother softly whispered. "I thought I heard something. I thought he had come. Did I dream, Alice?"

"Mother, dear mother," said Alice, putting her face close to the cold face of her dying parent, and scarcely able to draw a breath, "whom did you think had come?"

"Why, Charles; it seemed as if he had come. But I dreamt—did I, Alice?"

"Mother," said Alice, "could you see him? could you sustain it if you could see him?"

"Surely, child; why I long to see him; and I did think I should see him once more before I died."

At this instant the door softly opened, and Charles approached, cautiously—inquiringly.

"Mother," said Alice, "here—can you look up? do you know who this is?"

"Who is it, Alice—who is it?" inquired the half wild but still conscious mother.

"Mother," softly whispered Charles, as he knelt down and kissed her cold cheek,—"Mother!—my dear mother! Oh, will you—can you forgive your long-lost but penitent, broken-hearted child?"

"Charles! my dear Charles! is it indeed you?"

said the now nearly speechless mother, at the same time endeavoring to put her weak and feeble arm around his neck, "My dear boy, you have come; yes, I said you would come—you have; yes, I can now praise God! One question, Charles, and I die in peace,—is my boy a penitent?"

"Mother," said Charles, his tears nearly choking his utterance, "that Bible and a mother's prayers have saved me. I have come, and in season, to ask forgiveness. 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am now more worthy to be called thy son.' Mother, my dear mother, and will you forgive me also?"

"Enough—enough," said the departing mother; "yes, it is enough!" her countenance beaming, as it were, with seraphic joy.

"I am nearly through; but go, my son—go, my dear Alice, and publish it to the mothers of the land, what I have found true—and will continue true as long as praying mothers exist,—

'His loving-kindness changes not.'"

For a few moments following it was thought that she had ceased to breathe; but she revived sufficiently to press once more gently the hands of Charles and Alice; and then she was heard singing, in a faint and scarcely audible tone, those beautiful lines which she had often expressed a wish that she might have occasion to sing:

"Soon I shall pass the gloomy vale,  
Soon all my mortal powers must fail;  
Oh may my last expiring breath  
His loving kindness sing in death!"

The prayer was answered. "His loving-kindness" were the last sounds which were heard. They ceased here only to be resumed, and to be sung by the glorified and triumphant saint before the throne of God.

## AN AFTERNOON WALK.

The spirit of the injunction, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," is far from being rightly apprehended if we wait till the urgent claims of our duty crowd about us so that they almost impel us to action. To learn the lesson a-right, we must have a heart, an eye and ear alert to seize upon that which may affect our own or others' temporal and eternal welfare.

We must cease from turning on the pivot of selfishness, and cease from wrapping about ourselves merely the mantle of certain forms and ceremonies of religion, as if its folds would cover the broad principle of charity. Even when nothing but sin and degradation present themselves to our view, there are chords of feeling that may be reached, and a conscience is there that may be roused and enlightened.

But alas! how much of life is spent and mind wasted on we no not what—thoughts, feelings and perceptions hardly defined; and when our minds are active, often the veriest trifles of dress, furniture, change of plans, or perchance some morbid feeling of fancied or real wrong intended us, may occupy thoughts during many a walk or avocation that might be otherwise more usefully directed.

An incident, although of a common, every day occurrence, induced this train of thought, and we merely give it as an evidence that in our daily paths we have constantly the power to scatter the good seed.

It was a beautiful spring afternoon, and many had strolled forth eager to catch the warm breath of our tardy season; and as we turned from the more general throng into one of the broad open streets in the upper part of our city, we caught the sound of a lady's voice calling from an open window, "Come to me, little boy," and turning round, we saw a group of little boys standing so perfectly still that we came at once to the conclusion that some unusual commotion must have preceded such a calm. As we crossed over near the children who were standing in the middle of the street, a gentleman, who from a distance had observed the whole scene, hastily walked up to a stout boy of eight or nine, and shaking him smartly by the collar, asked him how he dared abuse the little boy of four or five who stood beside him? As soon as the boy could release himself from the firm grasp of the gentleman, he ran blubbering away, and at each step dropping from his basket the sticks he had just gathered. By this time the lady who first attracted our notice came from her house, and thanking the gentleman for his interference, went up to the little ragged urchin who