

THE FAMILY CIRCLE.

THE POCKET BIBLE;

OR

"HIS LOVING KINDNESS CHANGETH NOT."

I was standing at the counter of a book-store some years since, when a lady entered and inquired for pocket Bibles. I knew her well. A few years before she had married a respectable young merchant, who, although possessed but of little, if any, capital himself, had been started in business by a gentleman of wealth, with every prospect of success. He was active, honest, and enterprising; and, although he had married early after commencing business for himself—perhaps too early—the lady whom he had selected as his companion was worthy his choice. She had more ambition, some of her friends thought, than commensurate with their circumstances; and, although she contrived to repress it, in consideration that her husband's income, for the present was small, it was apparent that her spirit was aspiring, and that she was looking forward with some impatience to the time when she should be the mistress of a fine house, with furniture corresponding. A friend of his, who was married about the same time, had at once entered upon the enjoyment of these objects of ambition, and had even a handsome carriage at her command. Quite possibly, Matilda Grant cherished the secret hope that she might one day be able to visit that friend in a similar establishment of her own.

The dispensations of God, however, not unfrequently intervene to thwart our plans and defeat our cherished hopes of worldly good. He has higher views respecting us than we ourselves entertain—the elevation of our souls, and those of our friends, to a crown of glory in his own blessed mansions—and a preparation therefore is necessary, which requires sorrow here in order to joy hereafter. Through much tribulation must we enter into the kingdom of God.

For a few years Mr. Grant went on well in business. His purchases were made with judgment, and his goods were credited to those who, he thought, would be able to pay. But unfortunately, and unforeseen, his principal creditor failed, and in a single day Charles Grant was a bankrupt.

At the time of this sad reverse he was ill of a fever. It was difficult to conceal it from him; but the news had a still more unhappy effect upon him than was anticipated; and for that hour he continued to decline, and in a few weeks was carried to his long home. It was a grievous blow to his wife, with whom her friends most sincerely sympathized, and to whom they tendered for herself and two children—a son and a daughter—all the kind assistance which their circumstances allowed.

On an investigation of Mr. Grant's affairs, his failure proved even worse than was feared; and although the gentleman who had advanced the capital was quite liberal in the settlement of the concern, the widow and her children had but a few hundred dollars, and for most of that she was chiefly indebted, it was thought, to the generosity of her husband's friend.

This result, added to the loss of a fond and truly estimable man, made the shock more terrible. She felt the calamity keenly, and the more so, as she had no near relatives at hand to condole with her, and was ignorant of the divine consolations of religion. But there was mercy in her cup of sorrow. The Spirit of God came in to heal that troubled spirit, and to sanctify those trials to her soul. And at length she was enabled to bow in humble and quiet submission to the will of God, and betake herself to the support and education of her lovely children, now her solace and delight.

At the time I saw her in the book-store she was in pursuit of a pocket Bible for her son, named Charles, after his father. The purchase was soon made—it was a beautiful edition—not expensive—but just such as a fond and religious mother would wish to present to a son whom she loved, and which she hoped would prove a lamp unto his feet. A further circumstance about this Bible I knew in after years; on presenting it she turned the attention of the happy little fellow to a blank page in the beginning, on which, in a beautiful wreath, she had inscribed her own name, and under it the words, "To my son," followed by the appropriate and touching lines:

"A parent's blessing on her son
Goes with this holy thing;
The love that would retain the one,
Must to the other cling.
Remember 'tis no idle toy,
A mother's gift—Remember, boy!"

And still a little below were printed, in small but beautiful capitals, words which a mother's faith might well appropriate:—"HIS LOVING-KINDNESS CHANGES NOT."

At the age of seventeen, Charles Grant was a stout, strong, active youth. He was more than ordinarily ambitious, but as his ambition had not full scope, he was restless, and, I sometimes thought, unhappy. Had his mother, at this critical era of his life, been able to find him some employment suitable to his active and ambitious genius, it would have been fortunate indeed; but she knew of none; and, besides, she needed his aid—bus what was more than all, she was alone, and felt that she could not dispense with his company.

About this time a young sailor, by the name of Thornton, belonging to the neighborhood, arrived home from a voyage. Charles naturally fell in his way, and was delighted with the story of his wonderful adventures. He listened long and intently. His age and circumstances combined to excite in his ambitious bosom the desire for similar exciting scenes. Without designing any special wrong, young Thornton at length proposed to Charles to accompany him on his next voyage, which he should commence in a few weeks. For a time he hesitated, or rather declined—his mother and Alice would never consent, and to leave them by stealth was more than he felt willing to do. Thornton did not urge him, as it afterwards appeared, but Charles was himself strongly inclined to go, while the young sailor was quite willing to have a friend and companion so bright and enterprising as Charles Grant. In an evil hour the latter decided to go, and to go without the knowledge of his mother.

On the night appointed for their departure Charles rose from his bed when all was still, and softly feeling his way to the door, opened it and escaped. It was a beautiful night; and as he proceeded round the corner of the house to get a small bundle of clothes which he had concealed the day before, his heart beat with unusual violence, and for a few moments a faintness came over him at the thought of leaving a mother and sister, the only objects on earth whom he had ever truly loved. He stopped for a moment, as if meditating a better resolution—and then proceeded to the gate, which he opened and went out. Here he again paused—turned—looked—lingered—hesitated—and even put his hand again on the latchet, half resolved to creep once more to his little bed-room. But at that moment the low call of Thornton, at some distance, reached his ear—he had lingered longer than he was aware, and now the moment had arrived when he must go, if at all—with a sort of desperation of feeling, he hastened away, the tears trickling down his cheeks as he bade adieu to the humble cottage which contained all he loved on earth. His bundle was still under his arm, and in that bundle, I am glad to say, was "a mother's gift," the pocket Bible. Charles felt that he could not go without that, and perhaps he felt that the discovery that had taken it might serve somewhat to assuage a mother's sorrow.

Before morning the young sailors were a long way towards the seaport whence they expected to sail, and a couple of days brought them quite there. The ship, it so happened, was ready, and Charles having been accepted on the recommendation of Thornton, took up his line of duty before the mast. Shortly after, the ship weighed anchor, and stretched forth on a far distant voyage.

I must leave my readers to imagine, if they are able, the surprise and even consternation of Mrs. Grant and Alice, the morning following Charles' departure, at not finding him in the house nor about the premises. What could it mean?—what errand could have called him away?—at what hour did he leave?—what accident could have befallen him? Search was made for him by the increasingly anxious and terrified mother and sister for an hour and more, before they ventured to make known their solicitude to their neighbors. My own residence was not far distant; and before I had finished my breakfast, a messenger in haste made known the truly distressing situation of Mrs. Grant and Alice. I hastened to the

house—other friends at no distant hour were there,—inquiries were instituted,—messengers were dispatched around the town; but not the slightest tidings could be obtained, and even conjecture was baffled. At length, however, Mrs. Grant made the discovery that his better suit was gone, and there was a transient gleam of joy on her face as she announced that his pocket Bible was also not in his chest. Some days passed—long days and long and gloomy nights, before any satisfactory intelligence was received; and then the amount of that intelligence was in a short but affectionate letter from Charles himself, just then on the eve of sailing for the Pacific Ocean. It runs thus:

MY DEAR MOTHER.—Can you, will you forgive me for the step I have taken without your knowledge or consent? My heart has smote me every hour since I left you. I am at ——— and on board the ship ———, which sails in an hour for the Pacific Ocean. Fondest—best of mothers—do not grieve, I will one day return to bless and comfort you and my dear Alice. I must do something for you and her. Kiss her for me. Mother, I can write no more, only that I hope I shall have your prayers. I have got my pocket Bible, and shall keep it next my heart. Farewell.

Your affectionate son,
CHARLES GRANT.

P. S. I have somewhere read, what I am sure will prove true in my own case:

"Where'er I rove—whatever realms to see,
"My heart, untravell'd, fondly turns to thee."

By some means the letter did not reach the post-office so soon as it should have done, and the uncertainty bore heavily on the heart of a mother and sister. The post-master on its arrival kindly sent it to me; and, hoping that it contained tidings of the lost child, I ventured to break the seal. The truth—sorrowful as it was—was great relief, and was felt to be so by Mrs. Grant & Alice. Yet for a season—and who can marvel?—their hearts were filled with a sadness which scarcely admitted of alleviation; it was a dark and mysterious providence; and when friends called in, as they often did, to mingle their tears with the weeping, and to administer consolation, the most they could do was to weep, and to say, "His ways are in the sea, and his judgments past finding out."

But time does something—religion does more. By degrees these sorrowful ones were able to pray, and as the Christian poet says, "Prayer makes the darkest cloud withdraw."

So it did for them. They did not, indeed, recover their wonted cheerfulness—but they were calm and subdued. No murmur escaped the mother's lips, and even Alice seemed to have imbibed the spirit of a holy resignation, "Father, thy will be done."

But there were days of keen and bitter anguish, and in those nights, when the storm swept its angry blasts across their humble dwelling, and rocked their bed, it was impossible for a mother's heart not to tremble for her sailor-boy, far off upon the stormy ocean, and perhaps suffering the perils of the billowy tempest. But even at such times she was enabled to commit herself and her wandering child to the care and grace of a covenant-keeping God—uttering the language of holy confidence, "His faithfulness is as the everlasting mountains." "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

[To be continued.]

A CROWN GAINED.—A French officer, who was a prisoner on his parole at Reading, met with a Bible. He read it, and was so struck with its contents, that he was convinced as to the truth of Christianity, and resolved to become a Protestant. When his gay associates rallied him for taking so serious a turn, he said, in his vindication, "I have done no more than my old school-fellow, Bernadotte, who is become a Lutheran." "Yes, but he became so," said his associate, "to obtain a crown."—"My object," said the Christian officer, "is the same. We only differ as to the place." The object of Bernadotte is to obtain a crown in Sweden, mine to obtain one in Heaven."

DRESS.—There is not in the world a surer sign of a little soul, than the striving to gain respect by such despicable means as dress and rich clothes; none will depend on these ornaments but they who have no other.