

"HOLD THE FORT."

A MEMORIAL SKETCH OF THE LATE P. P. BLISS.

FRIDAY, December 29, 1876, was the last day that dawned upon the earthly life of "The sweet singer of Israel," P. P. Bliss. On the day previous Mr. Bliss and his wife left their mother's home, Rome, Pa., where they had been making a Christmas visit, and started for Chicago, when Mr. Bliss and Major D. W. Whittle were to continue, in the great Tabernacle, the evangelistic work begun by Moody and Sankay. As he rode he busied himself with Bible and paper, composing a new song which perished with him.

When within about twelve hours' ride of Chicago, the train on which they were travelling was wrecked by the fearful "Ashtabula disaster," words that will ring like a funeral knell in many lives for years to come. By the giving way of the bridge which spanned the Ashtabula River the whole train was precipitated into the ice-bound stream below. The cars were soon in flames, and the devastating elements of fire and water, adding their fury to the wild storm that was raging at the time, rendered the scene one of untold horror. The only circumstance connected with the death of Mr. and Mrs. Bliss that can be ascertained is that Mr. Bliss, after escaping out of a window of a car was burned to death on going back to rescue his wife.

At the time of his death Mr. Bliss was in the very prime and vigour of manhood, being thirty-eight years of age.

His boyhood and early manhood were spent in northwest Pennsylvania.

In the year 1864, Mr. George F. Root, of Chicago, the well-known music publisher, learning of his musical ability—both as a composer and leader, engaged his services. Mr. Bliss then removed to Chicago, and for nearly ten years went out into different parts of the West to conduct Normal Musical Institutes. He was also engaged during this time in composing Sunday-school music, the first of which appeared in 1870 in a book edited and published by Mr. George F. Root, entitled "The Prize."

These were days of beginnings and of trials in the life of Mr. Bliss and his wife. Yet they styled their humble home "The Kot o' Kontent," and gave a cheery welcome to the friends who visited them.

In 1871, Mr. Bliss's first book, "The Charm," appeared, and at once gave him a place among the favourite composers

Sunday-school music. About this time he was elected to the position of chorister in the first Congregational Church of Chicago (Rev. Dr. Goodwin's), of which he had become a member on coming to Chicago, having previously been a Methodist. He was also chosen superintendent of the large Sunday-school of that church, very many of whose members were led to Christ by his influence. Frequent demands were now made upon him to sing at dedications, anniversaries, and Sunday-school gatherings. On these occasions he gave his services whenever time would permit. His Normal Musical work still continued, and in 1872 he published a collection of new songs, duets, trios, and quartets, entitled "The Song Tree." Subsequently appeared "Sunshine," a book for Sunday-schools, and "The Joy," for classes, choirs, and conventions.

Mr. Bliss at length resigned his position as chorister, and his work as a musical leader, with much pecuniary sacrifice, in order to give himself wholly to evangelistic work. In July, 1874, he wrote to a friend:—"Major Whittle and I are holding protracted meetings. God is wonderfully using us in every way. Help us to praise Him for it."

Since then, Mr. Bliss was engaged earnestly and almost constantly in evangelistic work in connection with Major Whittle, and held evangelistic meetings in company with him at Mobile, Atlanta, Nashville, Louisville, Chicago, Peoria, Kalamazoo, Jackson, and many other places, and always with great success.

Mr. Bliss sang as earnest ministers preach, not for artistic effects, but to express and impress the Gospel.

His songs in these "Gospel meetings" were frequently prefaced with a short and earnest prayer by himself or by the reading or repeating of Scripture passages in the audience.

Mr. Bliss is known even more widely as a composer of

sacred song than as a singer, being the author of both words and music of the following popular songs: "Jesus loves even me," "Almost persuaded," "Hold the fort," "Pull for the shore," "What shall the harvest be?" "More to follow," "Hallelujah, 'tis done," "Free from the law," "Let the lower lights be burning," "Whosoever heareth," and "Only an armour-bearer."

In all these and his other hymns Mr. Bliss showed a remarkable skill in versifying evangelical doctrine in the very phrases of Scripture.

As to personal appearance, Mr. Bliss is thus pictured by one who knew him well:—"He was tall and well-developed in his physical frame, with clustering black hair and a hand-



THE LATE P. P. BLISS.

From a Photograph published by F. E. Longley.