

## SHADOW OF THE CROSS.

"IN HOC SIGNO VINCES."

Great joy, the Prince has come! Such was the glad whisper that ran throughout a lonely home, one bright April morning. It was the home of wealth and refinement, full of beautiful and costly things. But to the fond parents, their new treasure was more wonderful than the rarest bit of art in their possession.

"He shall be Felix," said the proud young father. "He shall be happy. Even his name shall mean prosperity."

Felix was a quiet baby, who rarely cried, and moved his little limbs far less often than the ordinary child. He had wonderfully expressive eyes, large, deeply-fringed, and golden-brown. Even the gruff family physician would stand and gaze into them admiringly.

When baby was a month old his young mother, while holding him, cried out suddenly, "Why, Nurse! what is the matter with the baby's back?"

The old nurse turned pale and was silent. Every day since his birth she had noticed the slight curve between the shoulders.

"Nurse!" said Mrs. Arden sharply, "what have you been hiding from me; is my child deformed?"

Just then Felix opened his great, brown eyes, and gazed up into her face with the wistful smile, that had already won him friends. His mother caught him to her heart, and exclaimed: "You are an angel, my Felix; I will die to make you happy!"

When the doctor came in response to the summons sent, the truth was made known. Little Felix would never be perfect in form. There would always be the curve between the shoulders, and his stature would be small.

"It's not very bad," said Dr. Minot, "and never will be greater in proportion than now. In a crowd the defect would pass unnoticed."

But the parents were comfortless. How could their Prince be less than perfection in all respects? Time passed, and before Felix had seen his fourth birthday, the noble young father was taken from them. Their terrible blow drew both mother and child nearer to each other.

"I must be everything to him, now," thought Mrs. Arden with a sigh.

Felix was not aware of his deformity. His wealth of golden hair, luminous brown eyes and winning sweetness of expression, made him a most lovely child in all eyes. Then he was such a happy little man; always content if serving others. It was hard to pity him, so serenely joyous was he.

But at last the lovely curls were cut from the fair head. The kilts and dainty jackets were exchanged for "real pants and coats, just like other boys."

One day Mrs. Arden observed Felix before the mirror, straining his little neck as if to get a rear view of his body.

"It has come!" was the agonized thought of the poor mother, "and I must help him."

The child said nothing, but his face wore a strange expression, and as he moved about his play the usual happy little laugh was not heard. When Felix was nearing his eighth year, he was sent to school at his own urgent request. Ah! how the mother-heart quivered in making this decision. How she dreaded to look into his face as her boy returned to her.

But not from his schoolmates did the apprehended blow fall. He returned home after playing with his cousin, one Saturday afternoon, at the appointed time, but with a lagging step, and in silence. The lovely little face was ashy pale, and the brown eyes eloquent with a strained anguish. His mother's arms opened, and he crept into them. There was a moment of quiet; heart spoke to heart; then the child said, passionately.

"Mother, why did you call me Felix, when I can never be happy? Clarence got angry, and called me 'a hideous little hunchback.' I asked him what he meant, and he said my back was humped when I was born. Mother, I know it, is so. I have often noticed it in the glass; it hurts me to lie down if I don't get fixed just so. Clarence said it broke my father's heart, and that you never could be proud of me. I cannot bear it," and the slender form quivered with anguish.

The brave mother held the sad face between her tender hands, and looked firmly into the piteous brown eyes.

"Clarence spoke falsely and wickedly," she said, with deliberation. "I may be proud of you, my loving boy; all the prouder, even, because of this cross you must carry—I have never deceived you, Felix, believe me now. You can make me the proudest, happiest mother living."

"How?" he asked, breathlessly, a look of hope leaping into his sad eyes.

She led him to her own room before a picture in a curious silver and ebony frame. It was "Christ in the Temple," and designed to hang in her son's room.

"You know the story," she said.

"Here is a boy whose first public experience was disappointment; whose first public action was still one of obedience. He was about his Father's business; and yet 'He returned with his parents, and was subject unto them.' He never thought of Himself, nor did he try to serve himself. He was weary, poor and despised as he grew to manhood. His own people would not receive him, and the world he loved and served accused him of evil. He was homeless, cruelly treated, yet he did not cease his work. He would have comforted the whole world, but it scorned him. At last he was put to death by the very hands he tried to save. People said, 'That is the last of him; he will soon be forgotten.' Was it so? Who is remembered as Christ is remembered? He gave to the world courage to bear its sorrow. Because he lived his loving life other sad hearts have looked hopefully up, and he still leads the world. People are realizing, as never before, the beauty of goodness. They are striving for it, as never before; and the struggle is bringing them nearer to God. Do you understand me, my Felix?"

"Yes, mother!" he said gravely, "I must just learn with God's help to bear it. I know you are sorry—but can you be proud of me?"

"My boy, the love I bore you as a tiny babe was nothing as compared with the love I bear you now,—now that I know you must suffer. Your cross, my little son, has been my crown; now you must win your crown through your very pain."

"Do you mean that I can be a little man because I must suffer?"

"Yes, dear, and you will be in royal company. You will walk with Christ and all other noble souls. No good work has ever been done but some one has suffered for it. Will you walk with Christ, my Felix, and make the world gladder and better because you have suffered—because my little boy has lived?"

He slipped from her embrace and stood before her; a look of solemn resolve upon his young face. "I will!" he said, bowing his bright head, and flinging out his arms, half unconsciously.

The afternoon sun was streaming in at the western window, and upon the walls was thrown the shadow of a cross, made by the childish figure in its unconscious attitude. The mother saw it, and her heart throbbed with a holy exaltation. "Dear God," was her heart prayer, "though the shadow be over him, let there always be the glory ahead." As if in answer to her prayer, the clustering locks caught the radiance, and there was a halo about the patient face.

And did the years prove the hope true? It was a sweet and helpful boyhood, and a young manhood full of lofty cheer. He was so truly happy, so full of brave hopefulness, that the perplexed, the sorrowing, the poor turned to him; the wise and great listened to him as to a superior.

It was in the terrible days of bloodshed and death. The angelic face of the young chaplain drew the hearts of the rough soldiers, as by magnetic force. It was the battle of— and the enemy had left behind a red field, sown with the bodies of the dead and dying. Felix was moving among them when struck down by a stray shot.

They lay there long—those suffering ones, until the moon rose over the scene. Near Felix was a mere boy,—a lad moaning his life away.

"Ma mere! ma mere!" he cried in his soft foreign accents.

Felix dragged himself to the child and managed to gather the chestnut curls upon his breast. He spoke to him in his own tongue, and the delirious lad, imagining him to be the waiting mother in his New Orleans home, wandered on happily.

They were on the edge of the little ceme-

tery,—indeed some of the wounded lay upon the graves.

"See!" cried the lad "the Holy Cross! Dear Christ! Dear Christ!"

Looking up Felix saw upon the turf the shadow thrown by the rude cross that marked a newly made grave. He watched it through the long hours after the bright head rested in sleep upon his breast.

Then it seemed to waver, to walk toward him, and a noble face bent to his. And in the light of that face his pain slipped away.

"My Master!" he said very softly.

When the morning came, and the little birds sang jubilantly over that sad scene, the first sunbeam touched as with living gold the smiling face of Felix. The shadow of the cross had fled. Upon the Prince had dawned the brightness of an Eternal morning.—K. L. Brown, in the *Silver Cross*.

## MR. KIRK AND THE SKEPTIC.

The late Rev. E. N. Kirk was widely known as a faithful and earnest minister of the gospel, always ready, and wisely and discreetly ready, to speak for Christ and to point men to him as the only Saviour.

A skeptical gentleman who knew him and was aware of his earnest readiness to speak to others on the subject of religion, found himself one day on the same steamer with Mr. Kirk, both of them bound for a voyage to Europe. Thinking that he would often be annoyed on the voyage by Mr. Kirk's solicitations, he said to him, as they were just leaving the harbor, "I suppose, Mr. Kirk, you will feel it your duty to be often speaking to me on the subject of religion while we are together, so please say now what you have to say, that the subject may not again be mentioned."

As his only reply, Mr. Kirk said, with deep and tender seriousness, "My dear sir, I was a lost and unforgiven sinner, but in Christ I found pardon, acceptance and salvation, and my earnest prayer is that you may find the same," and turning he left him. Nothing further was added, but the gentleman afterwards said to a friend, "That reply, so tenderly and earnestly given, I shall never forget, and if I ever become a Christian, it will be owing to those words so kindly and faithfully spoken."—*American Messenger*.

## CHILD POSSIBILITIES.

For one thing you never know what child in rags and pitiful squalor that meets you in the street may have in him the germ of gifts that might add new treasures to the storehouse of beautiful things or noble acts. In that great storm of terror that swept over France in 1793, a certain man who was every hour expecting to be led off to the guillotine uttered this memorable sentiment: "Even at this incomprehensible moment," he said, "when mortality, enlightenment, love of country—all of them only make death at the prison door or on the scaffold more certain—yes, on the fatal tumbrel itself, with nothing free but my voice, I could still cry Take care, to a child that should come too near to the wheel; perhaps I may save his life, perhaps he may one day save his country." This is a generous and inspiring thought—one to which the roughest-handed man or woman in Birmingham may respond as honestly and heartily as the philosopher who wrote it. It ought to shame the listlessness with which so many of us see the great phantasmagoria of life pass before us.—*John Morley*.

## WHY THE MESSENGER WAS LATE.

*Messenger* readers have, for some weeks back, had their patience taxed to the utmost. Every day complaints are pouring in, and as many more, we fear, are yet on the way. We can only thank those who have not written for their forbearance and assure all our subscribers that when once we get fairly settled in our new quarters, the reason for all these trying delays will be gone. Think of the worst household moving you ever experienced, and multiply that by twenty-five and you will have some faint idea of the work it is to move a newspaper establishment. However, we are

getting into something like working shape once more, and soon no more delays may be looked for.

We hope before long to give all our readers, as far at least as pencil and printer's ink can do it, a good view of every department of our new quarters, which are even now, while yet far from finished, the admiration of all who see them.

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