

A MOTHER'S LAST PRAYER.

BY ANN S. STEPHENS.

"First our flowers die—and then
Our hopes, and then our fears—and when
These are dead the debt is due,
Dust claims dust—and we die too."

I WAS very young, scarcely beyond the verge of infancy, the last and most helpless of three little girls who were gathered around my poor mother's death-bed. When I look on the chain of my varied existence—that woof of gold and iron woven so strangely together—the remembrance of that young being who perished so early and so gently from the bosom of her family, forms the first sad link which ever gives forth a thrill of funereal music when my heart turns to it—music which becomes more deep-toned and solemn as that chain is strengthened by thought, and bound together by the events of successive years. The first human being that I can remember, was my invalid mother, moving languidly about her home, with the paleness of disease sitting on her beautiful features, and a deep crimson spot burning with painful brightness in either cheek. I remember, that her step became unsteady and her voice fainter and more gentle, day by day, 'till, at last, she sunk to her bed, and we were called upon to witness her spirit go forth to the presence of Jehovah. They took me to her couch, and told me to look upon my mother before she died. Their words had no meaning to me then, but the whisper in which they were spoken thrilled painfully through my infant heart, and I felt that something very terrible was about to happen. Pale, troubled faces were around that death-pillow—stern men, with sad, heavy eyes—women overwhelmed with tears and sympathy, and children, that huddled together shuddering and weeping, they knew not wherefore. Filled with wonder and awe, I crept to my mother, and burying my brow in the mass of rich brown hair that floated over her pillow, heavy with the damp of death, but still lustrous in spite of disease, I trembled and sobbed without knowing why, save that all around me was full of grief and lamen-

tation. She murmured, and placed her pale hand on my head. My little heart swelled, but I lay motionless and filled with awe. Her lips moved, and a voice, tremulous and very low, came faintly over them. These words, broken and sweet as they were, left the first dear impression that ever remained on my memory—"Lead her not into temptation, but deliver her from evil." This was my mother's last prayer! in that imperfect sentence, her gentle voice went out for ever. Young as I was, that prayer had entered my heart with a solemn strength. I raised my head from its beautiful resting-place, and gazed awe-stricken upon the face of my mother. Oh, how an hour had changed it! The crimson flush was quenched on her cheeks, a moisture lay upon her forehead, and the grey, mysterious shadows of death were stealing over each thin feature, yet her lips still moved, and her deep blue eyes were bent on me, surcharged with spiritual brightness, as if they would have left one of their vivid, unearthly rays, as the seal of her death-bed covenant. Slowly as the sunbeam's pale at nightfall from the leaves of a flower, went out the starlight of those eyes; a mist come over them, softly as the dews might fall upon that flower, and she was dead. Even then, I knew not the meaning of the solemn change I had witnessed, but when they bore me forth from my mother's death-bed, my heart was filled with fear and misgiving.

All were overwhelmed with the weight of their own sorrow, and I was permitted to wander around my desolated home unchecked and forgotten. I stood wondering by as they shrouded my mother, and smoothed the long hair over her pale forehead. Silently I watched them spread the winding-sheet, and fold those small pale hands over her bosom, but when they closed the blinds, and went forth, my little heart swelled with a sense of unkindness in shutting out the sunshine, and the sweet summer air which had so often called a smile to her pale lips, when it came to her bed, fragrant from the rose-thickets and the