


Written for THE QUEEN.

A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.

BY ELLA. F. FLANDERS.

“AMMA, does God always hear our prayers?” asked little Agnes Mason, and her clear eyes eagerly sought her mother’s face in anticipation of her answer.

Mrs. Mason turned wearily on her pillow and looked for a moment into the wistful eyes. “Yes, darling, God always hears the earnest prayers of his children.”

“And does he answer them too, mamma?”

“Yes, Agnes, we read in his own book, ‘Ask, and ye shall receive.’”

“Well, mamma, I have prayed *so hard* that you might be well, and we go to the cool green country; why don’t He answer my prayer?”

Mrs. Mason hesitated before answering the question so artlessly put by her child. This was one which had perplexed many older and wiser persons than little Agnes. There were times when even her faith wavered, and she felt almost forsaken, but she knew that He who guarded the sparrow’s fall was also guiding her weary feet, so she said: “My dear child, God does not always answer our prayers at once, but in his own time and way He will surely help all those who trust in Him.”

“Then I will ask Him once more, mamma,” and the childish form knelt by her mother’s bed and clasped her tiny hands in prayer.

As Mrs. Mason looked upon the fair upturned face, the tears gathered in her dark eyes, and her thoughts went back to the time when ten short years before she stood a happy bride. Gerald Mason had his own fortune to make, but he was energetic and honorable, and with loving, happy hearts they began their new life. How well she remembered the tiny cottage they first called home. How happy and contented they were. It was there Agnes, their only one, was born, and as the happy mother gazed into the face of her new-born babe, she felt that for her life held no richer boon, but after a few short years misfortune came; the husband and father was taken sick, and after a lingering illness died, leaving his young wife to bear life’s heavy burdens alone. She was aroused from her grief by the imperative necessity of doing something toward the support of herself and child; the small bank account which was theirs beside their home had dwindled to a small sum, and with an energy born of necessity, she asked for and obtained work; for a time she was successful, but unused to the long hours of steady work, which as a seamstress were necessarily hers to obtain even a meagre support for herself and child, and worn with grief and care, she found herself ill and unable to longer continue their means of support.

Another ear than Mrs. Mason’s heard the questioning words of little Agnes, and another eye than hers gazed upon the kneeling child.

Dr. Phillip Allen, in his daily round of professional calls, paused for a moment as he heard the child’s questions and awaited her mother’s answer, and through the half open door he looked upon the fair face; as the child rose from her knees, he brushed a tear from his eye and passed in with his usually cheerful “Good morning.”

He had but recently been called to attend Mrs. Mason and with the practised eye of his profession, he realized that

her frail constitution was breaking from overwork and anxiety. He prescribed a stimulating medicine and advised entire rest; then speaking a few words of comfort and cheer to both Mrs. Mason and little Agnes, he passed on to relieve and strengthen the sick and afflicted in other homes.

As he sat in his office after a long and busy round of calls, his mind constantly reverted to sweet little Agnes, whose simple, childish faith had wonderfully impressed him, and tenderly and lovingly he thought of another Agnes, who for a few brief years was the light of his life. Agnes Merton was an orphan and had just completed her education under the care of a guardian, when she met Phillip Allen, then a young man of twenty-five.

He was charmed by her delicate beauty, her rare grace and well-stored mind, while she in turn learned to love the handsome young doctor, and after a brief engagement they were married. Philip had chosen the practice of medicine as his profession and graduated with the highest honors. Wealth was at his command, and the future looked bright indeed for the young couple. After a year’s travel in Europe they returned home, and the young doctor began his professional career. Eminently adapted to the profession he had chosen, both by natural gifts and a thorough education, he rose rapidly in his profession, but after a time the fair face that watched so eagerly for his home coming grew more delicate and the light step seemed to lose its elasticity.

“I’m not ill,” she said to Phillip’s eager questions, “only tired.” But a naturally frail constitution and an inherited consumptive tendency sounded the alarm; and after consulting the most eminent physicians it was decided that only a change of climate could benefit or even prolong the life of the one dearest in all the world to Phillip Allen.

They sojourned in summer among the islands of the beautiful St. Lawrence and Canada’s health-giving lakes and forests; then, as autumn advanced, to the sunny south, and in winter to golden California with her mountains and sea-air; but gradually the frail life was slipping away. Phillip, unwilling for a moment to face the stern reality, still hoped. For some time they had been at Santa Barbara.

“Lovely, quaint Santa Barbara,” said Agnes one day, “there is such a restful air about the whole place; the old mission with its stepstones grown worn by the pressure of many feet; the few monks moving noiselessly about; the quaint, quiet streets; the beautiful trees, where the mocking-bird lovingly calls to its mate; the golden sands washed by the grand old Pacific—all these speak to me of rest. Oh, Phillip, something warns me that soon I must leave you, and if I should die here, lay me to rest in the quiet old cemetery. No,” said she, “do not say I will get well; death claims us all, and though it breaks my heart to leave you, I am ready for the end. Do not grieve, although the world for a time will seem dark, there is work for you yet. Return to the east; take up your profession, and work; there is no solace for grief like that; and in your profession your chances for doing good are unbounded. Remember, dear, it is my prayer that you may become a comforter to the stricken.”

A few days after this all that was mortal of Agnes Allen was laid to rest in quaint Santa Barbara. “‘The waves sing her requiem,’ and I must do her bidding,” sighed Phillip