

FAMILY DEPARTMENT.

"MY LIFE AND THINE."

L.L.L.

BY FLORA E. W. TORREY.

"My life compared with Thine!" you moan
And moaning thus, repine
That God should make less beautiful
Thy life than mine.
Ah! moaning heart, be still,
And learn His will.

"My life compared with Thine," you sigh,
"Is lonely, dark and drear;
Thy happy hours pass lightly by,
While I in fear
Await each day new woes,
Remorseless foes.

"My life compared with Thine! Ah me,
That lives should differ so!
Thou, gay and bright 'mid brilliant scenes
Where joys o'erflow.
While I must dwell apart,
And bear the smart.

"My life compared with Thine! Thy home
With happy love made bright;
While o'er my life love's star hath set
In darkest night.
The night and day are one,
No warmth of sun."

Thy life compared with mine? Alas!
Thou canst not judge the heart;
And may not read, by outward sign,
The inner part.
Each soul hath griefs to bear
Which none may share.

Thy life compared with mine, perchance
To Thee appears less bright;
Yet oft the hearts which gayest seem
Have most of night.
Smiles cover well below
A world of woe.

Thy life as well as mine, dear friend,
Was planned by wise decree;
The 'Giver of good gifts' bestowed
Thy life on thee.
Let grateful thoughts arise
To the All-Wise.

Judge not thy life and mine; expand
Thy soul to God's pure air;
And thus the germ of some sweet flower
Shall blossom there.
And far beyond the skies
The fragrance rise.

God grant thy life and mine may hold
Some cultivated flower,
Which shall redeem the bed of weeds,
At the last hour,
And may sweet peace be thine,
Dear friend of mine.

THE BETHLEHEMITES.

FROM THE GERMAN, BY JULIE SUTTER.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

"We too are waiting, yes, waiting for the King," said the old woman, approaching her son. "Shall I, even I, see the King in His beauty, before I go hence to the land afar?" Her eyes were bright with tears.

"It may be so," said the priest.

The children had so far listened breathlessly. They had often heard of the Messiah that should come to save His people; but it seemed a future event. Could it be possible that even now the time might be fulfilled?

"Father," cried Samuel, "where will He be born? What was the chief priests' answer to Herod?"

A beam of joy lit up the face of Zadok, as he

turned to his children, repeating to them what is written by the prophet: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

"Here? In our own Bethlehem?" cried the children excitedly. "Shall the Messiah be born here?"

"Thus saith the prophet," replied the father.

"Perhaps he is here already," suggested Rachel wisely. "There are so many strangers here to be taxed."

Zadok rejoicing: "We know nothing, save that he will be a Bethlehemite like ourselves."

The Children were silent, a holy awe settling upon them. Not till now had they heard that wondrous prophecy. Joseph presently repeated the words to himself, as if to engrave them upon his memory, whispering to his twin-brother after a while:

"If He will be there, I shall like entering upon the temple service. He will dwell in His own sanctuary, don't you think so Samuel?"

"He may—perhaps not—I cannot tell," said the latter.

The sun was sinking behind the hills, a golden glory flooding the roofs, and illumining with a bright reflex the priest's family, that now gathered for worship. Rachel had fetched the book, that is a parchment scroll; and having taken off the silken covering, unrolling the Scriptures, the priest took it up by the wooden handles on either side reading with sonorous voice:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

CHAPTER III.

On the terrace of another house on the hill a little distance, sat a girl, her little brother playing with a pet lamb at her feet. She was a Roman maiden, of noble parentage, her father being a centurion of the garrison stationed at Bethlehem. Virginia was his comfort, her mother having died, leaving the baby-boy to her care; but she was often lonely and sad, especially now when her father was away at the citadel and much taken up with the taxing of the people. This very day she had been more than usually dejected, not even caring to go and visit her friend and neighbour Zillah. The latter was an Egyptian, whose father, for many years had practised in a Jewish colony near the great city of Thebes. Zillah's mother had long been dead, leaving him that one child, now a grown maiden of thirteen. He had married again, his second wife also being of delicate health; and hoping to benefit her by the fresh air of the hills of Juda, he had brought her away from the burning sun of Egypt, settling at Bethlehem. She recovered in a measure, yet often Zillah had to take her place with her little step-brothers and sisters, and young as she was, the household was her care. She was a bright, active girl, delighting in her duties, which left her but little time to spend on the roof, or saunter dreamily about the garden like her friend Virginia. The two were fond of each other, but to the Roman maiden's grief Zillah had rarely an hour to spare to brighten her friend's life with her merry presence. And to tell the truth Virginia was loth to visit the Egyptian damsel. Zillah often would say:

"I cannot come to you, because mother needs me, and the children want me, and the house must be looked after. But there is no reason why you should not come to me! We might have pleasant talking over here."

Virginia then would look embarrassed, not knowing what excuse to make. The fact was, that she felt an unconquerable aversion to enter the Egyptian chamber, where two bandaged mummies stood leaning against the wall, the one being Zillah's mother, the other her grandfather. The physician had brought them away on leaving his home by the Nile. Now there was an

urn in the centurion's house, containing the ashes of his dear wife, and Virginia looked upon it as her dearest treasure; but then it was an alabaster vase beautifully wrought, and not a shrivelled corpse, with lifeless painted face staring at her with sunken eyes like those horrible mummies. Nor did she love to look upon the ugly images all about the Egyptian dwelling representing their deities. Moreover the children were a noisy tribe, and if ever she took her own little charge, Titus, to play with them, his negro nurse, Afta, was sure to complain afterwards of his getting wild with his little neighbors. Thus the fastidious Virginia spent most of her time at home, full of longing in her loneliness.

She would hold a little intercourse at times with Rachel across the wall that separated the two gardens. The Roman maiden had a liking for the gentle Jewess, and the latter, having no sister of her own, felt drawn to the motherless girl. Yet real friendship seemed scarcely possible; for was not the one the child of a Roman, the other the daughter of a Jew; the one belonging to the cruelly oppressing, the other to the conquered race? Moreover, Virginia worshipped idols, her father's household gods adorning the atrium, or inner court. Fine statues of Ceres and Venus, too, were there; and that very morning she had lovingly wreathed them with garlands of flowers; to Ceres also, the goddess of genial gifts, she had brought an offering of fruit, honoring Venus, as the goddess of love, with a libation of fiery wine. Such adoration she had been taught by her father, and she would marvel at seeing the Jewish family on the roof of their house, lifting eyes and hands toward heaven in worship of Jehovah, the unseen God.

"I cannot understand," she would say to the negro nurse, "how they can pray to a God whom they see not with their eyes."

Virginia had been to Jerusalem, she visited the temple, the splendid edifice on Moriah, rich with marble and shining gold, that filled her with rapture, as it first rose to her vision. But great was her surprise on entering the courts to find neither images nor aught in representation of the god-head; and no adornments save the architectural splendor which clothed the walls. How awful seemed the place in its stillness, white-robed priests gliding in and out! And how simple appeared the worship of burnt offering, incense and holy psalm! There was nothing mysterious, nothing hidden from the light of day, like the heathen rites she knew of; no revelry was there, no orgies disgracing God and man.

Her father, the centurion, would often speak lovingly of Rome, of her palaces, her pleasures, her feasts in the arena. Not so Virginia, who had grown accustomed to the life in Judaea in these quiet years since her mother's death. She had found out, to be sure that the people of the land who worshipped Jehovah would have nothing in common with the nation of idols; her proud father moreover had forbidden her to be on friendly terms with her Jewish neighbors. And since their houses almost touched, she could not but watch the habits of the priest's family, especially when they gathered on the roof. In the stillness of the present evening there she was a witness to the scene we have described. And though she could not hear all that was said, yet she understood from their gestures that a solemn subject of unusual interest must be the theme of their conversation. But those words of prophecy which Zadok had spoken with uplifted voice rung in her ear, filling her with marvel as to their import. "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

"What could be the meaning," she mused, "a God, a governor at Bethlehem? The Jews worship but one God, how should there be another at Bethlehem?" And again, "His