

"in the midst of her," Psalm xlii. 6. He never lets go the helm. St. Matt. xvi. 28, and let us remember that being Man, He can feel for us; being God, He can strengthen us, save us, and bring us unto the desired heaven. Let us pray that "we may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that we finally come to the land of everlasting life." (Baptism service.)

Christmas Reading.

A PRISON CHRISTMAS STORY.

Continued from our last issue.

CHAPTER II.—POINTING THE WAY.

It may seem incredible that in a Christian country such an incident should ever have taken place, as the desertion of the young girl by the keeper of the van in which her childhood had been passed; yet we can assure our readers that it is no fiction. These events happened, precisely as they are here related, to a poor child, literally without name or friends, who afterwards drifted into the prison we have designated as U—and the state of complete ignorance of all religion, which we have described in Kitty, is no less strictly true. It is to be feared that there are indeed many such cases, even in this favoured land.

The lady visitor at the gaol devoted herself with great earnestness to the girl's instruction during the weeks which followed their first conversation, and she found the process much less tedious and difficult than she had anticipated. Kitty proved to be singularly intelligent, and her intense susceptibility to kindness soon led her to attach herself to her teacher with the most enthusiastic affection.

It was the simple truth, as she had told it, that no one had ever been a friend to her before, except the good farmer, whose kindness had led to such unfortunate results; and soon the lady's visits became periods of such delight to her that they enabled her, lawless and wayward as she was, to bear all the intervening hours of gloom and silence with exemplary patience.

The discipline of the gaol also acted with a thoroughly salutary effect on her impetuous nature, and it was a very meek and docile Kitty who used at last to welcome the lady with outstretched hands and sparkling eyes when she entered her cell.

By the time that the Christmas Day, once so longed for, was drawing near, the young prisoner had not only learned how great a sin her theft had really been, and how just was her punishment, but she had also acquired a thorough knowledge, intellectually, of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and had shown much deep feeling when the Divine Lord's sorrowful life and death were detailed to her. The girl had never known what it was to pray, either in private or in public worship, before she came to the prison, and although she had there duly learned to address reverent words to her Maker night and morning, simply because her teacher told her it was right to do so, yet her friend saw very clearly that she was as far as ever removed from understanding what is meant by that full outpouring of the heart before the God of all compassion, which alone deserves the name of prayer.

One morning, when the lady entered Kitty's cell, she saw that she had been weeping bitterly, and though she wiped her eyes on seeing her welcome visitor, they retained a wistful, yearning expression, which showed that some grief lay heavy on her mind. A few kind words soon led her to tell all her trouble to her sympathetic teacher.

"Oh, lady! I have felt all the morning as if my heart would break, for when we went to prayers the chaplain gave out that next Tuesday would be Christmas Day, and you know that's the very day that was to have been my grand, beautiful holiday—the only one I was ever promised in all my life. Oh! to think of the happiness it would have been! Me going in Mr. Dean's own pony trap to his fine home, and sleeping there two nights, and running about with his girls to see all his sheep and poultry and his garden. He told me I should, and we was to have games, and oh! such a dinner, and presents. He said there would be some for me as

well as the others, and I should be as free as a bird, with nobody to scold me or drive me about, and no work to do! Oh! to think of it! and now I'm here to spend the day all by myself, locked up in gaol, and I'll never, never have that beautiful Christmas as long as I live."

And poor Kitty burst into tears again almost as forlorn as on the first day when she had flung herself on the ground in her rebellious despair.

Then a strange inspiration, like a light from heaven, seemed all in a moment to flash on the mind of her visitor, bringing a strong conviction that this simple, childish trouble might become the very crisis of the poor girl's spiritual history, and with a brief lifting up in supplication that it might be so, she suddenly took Kitty's two hands within her own, and drew her round so that she could meet the intense gaze of the earnest eyes fixed upon her.

"Kitty," she said, "listen to me, for I have words to say to you that may influence your whole life, not only in this world, but in that which is to come for ever and ever. You are in despair because, instead of the pleasant holiday you were to have had, you expect that your Christmas Day will be only very sad, and dark, and lonely. Now I tell you that there is a means whereby, if you will, you may make it the most joyful, happy, and blessed of days to yourself; more lovely and sweet than any you have ever dreamt of before. Kitty, have you not often told me you never had a friend in all the days you have lived?"

"None but yourself, dear lady," said the girl, timidly, for there was that in her visitors look and manner which awed her, she knew not why.

"I am a poor weak mortal, like yourself, my child, and my friendship can be little worth; but if you will—oh! Kitty, if you will—that Christmas Day may bring to you a Friend Who has all power in heaven and earth; Who will take you up into the arms of His mercy and fill you with the rapture of His everlasting love; Who will crown your life with joy and gladness, and bring you at the last into His own glorious home, where the pure light never fails, and the flowers never fade, where pain and sorrow cannot enter, and all is sweetest joy and peace for evermore. Kitty, that Friend will come, if you choose on Christmas Day, into this very cell; He will come to you, and call you by your name as His own child; He will wipe away all your tears, and tell you to rest now and always in His deathless tenderness and care, and then you will never be lonely any more, nor sorrowful, nor desolate, for He Himself will be your endless bliss, and your exceeding great reward."

"But, oh! lady, lady! how could I get such a friend?" said the girl, her eyes opened wide with surprise and eager longing.

"What did I tell you was the meaning of Christmas Day?"

"The birthday of the Lord Jesus Christ; the day when He came down out of heaven into this world."

"Yes, you are right; but, Kitty, He has never yet come to you to be your own very Friend, and Lord, and Life. It is He, and none other, who will make you His own beloved, happy child this coming Christmas, if only you yourself are ready to receive Him. He may be new-born in your soul that day, even as He was in this world eighteen hundred years ago, and if once He comes to you, then, your own Divine eternal Friend, He will never leave you nor forsake you in life or in death, or throughout the endless ages of existence that await us all beyond the grave."

"But, oh! dear lady, how can I make Him come?—how?—how? tell me!" exclaimed the girl, clasping her hands and breathing quickly in her anxiety.

"Dear child," said the lady softly, "do you not remember that He said, 'Whoever you shall ask in My name I will do it—ask and you shall receive?' If you ask Him with all your heart and soul to come to you, you may be very sure that He will not refuse."

"Do you mean that I am to pray to Him?" she said eagerly.

"Yes, only not as you have prayed hitherto, with cold unmeaning words, you must pour out your whole heart before Him hour after hour, till you

know that He has heard and answered. Let no other thought be in your mind but that one heart-wrung supplication—at your work—in your cell—in chapel—wherever you are—still send out from your soul that strong, beseeching cry, 'Oh! my Saviour, come to me, I beseech Thee, come to me—come, oh come, Lord Jesus.' Even when you sleep, let your heart be awake to that longing. I shall not enter your cell during these three days. I will leave you alone with God, for vain in such an effort is the help of man."

She rose as she spoke, and giving the girl's hand a silent pressure, left her without another word.

CHAPTER III.—THE PRAYER ANSWERED.

It was with no small anxiety that the lady visitor of U—gaol passed within its gloomy precincts at an early hour on the long-expected Christmas morning. It was an occasion when she felt bound to see the whole of the prisoners, in order that she might try, by at least a few kind words, to lighten their heavy sadness on that memorable day, which should have been so bright; but her thoughts as she went from one cell to another were all with Kitty, and she almost trembled in the suspense of knowing how it fared with her, when at last that especial door was unlocked for her entrance, and she went forward quickly into the presence of the young prisoner. One glance at the radiant face, serene and bright with an ineffable peace it had never known before, and the eloquent eyes swimming in happy tears, was enough to tell her that her faith and hope for this dear child had rested on a sure foundation.

"On, Thou that hearest prayer to Thee shall all flesh come," she murmured, as the young girl, flinging herself down before her, clasped her knees with eager arms, and poured forth all the enraptured joy of her heart, into which of a very truth the Day Star had dawned that blissful morning. Not many words were needed to tell her sympathetic listener how day and night for that intervening time she had besieged the gate of heaven with entreaties that even to her might come on Christmas morn the Light of the World, to be her own Divine Friend for evermore. In response to her heartfelt prayers, the young prisoner, the friendless orphan child, had found in the Lord of Heaven and earth Him Whom her soul loved, and never more would she let Him go in time or in eternity.

From that day Kitty was an altered being;—gentle, bright and happy, she responded to every influence which could elevate her nature and inform her mind. The prison chaplain took almost as great an interest in her as the lady visitor, and between them she received regular instruction in reading and writing, and in everything which could fit her to be a useful and intelligent member of society. She improved so much in every way under their guidance that when the time came for her release from prison, she found, to her infinite delight, that the lady had decided to take her into her own service, and that under her tender care a happier home was provided for her than she had ever so much as dreamt of in all her sad young life before.

And there were even greater joys yet in store for her. It came to pass, that on Mid-summer-day, Kitty was actually allowed to enjoy the holiday visit to Mr. Dean's farm, which she had so painfully forfeited, and that not one day only, but for several weeks. Kitty's whole history had been fully explained to the kind farmer by the lady, who had been so much pleased with his family and his pretty home when she went for the purpose to the farm, that she had arranged to take lodgings for the summer months, and thus Kitty found herself established as an inmate of the beautiful country home she had so longed to see.

Strangely happy she was during those summer weeks, and they proved to be but the prelude to a deeper and more permanent happiness which was to be hers in connection with that house. During the pleasant intercourse of that summer holiday, the farmer's son came to the conclusion that Kitty was the most charming and lovable girl he had ever known; and it was no matter of surprise to any one that he did think so, for the wonderful spiritual change that had been wrought in her had enhanced her natural beauty by a sweetness of expression

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