

"THAT CHILD."

BY MARY J. CROSMAN.

(From the Rural New-Yorker.)

Life is a mystery, a mingling together of the known and the unknown, real and the ideal, the beautiful, the terrible, and the stern—a wondrous melody wherein low rhythms of magic sweetness and delicate minor notes of thrilling pathos blend and alternate with the deep bass which is sometimes rough, sometimes jarring.

It gave our village such a shock when the rumor passed from lip to lip that Esq. Jones had failed—he, whom the school children said had "oceans of money," and whose name the humble folk regarded as the synonym of gold. Many of the poorer class had placed their hard earned dollars in his keeping, and among them was my father. True, the sum was small—only two hundred and fifty dollars—but it would nearly cancel the mortgage against our little home. My father had been a confirmed invalid for years. I remember his nights of suffering, so intense that it seemed the spirit must break free from the tenement that inclosed it. To these would succeed days of dreamy rest and quietude. Feeling that his time on earth was short, it had been his cherished hope to leave our place unencumbered.

Alice and I were the only children, and all the family. When we were little girls mother went away to the Upper Homestead, whose walls are of jasper, garnished with all precious stones, and the foundations thereof are of gold like unto clear glass; and, reader, to these mansions, my father had long held a "title clear." Mother's portrait in the parlor served to retain her likeness in our memories, and in childhood I knew we would sit and cry for hours on the sofa beneath it, because we should see her face no more. Dr. Brown, our next door neighbour, used to say she was "one of the few women who was worth her weight in gold," and praise from him was always merited. She was not only good but beautiful, and Alice was her counterpart. Sometimes when she would sit by father's bedside to talk or read to him, he would close his eyes, and, in delicious dreaming, forget but that the silvery tones belonged to her of the angel-land.

After our loss, father sank rapidly. He had never possessed that strong, obstacle-overcoming nature which belongs to manhood, and in general management and business tact he was deficient; but the

virtues and graces that thrive best on other soil, and that may be transferred beyond the veil, adorned and glorified his character. His last hours were almost free from pain. The visions and the thoughts that swept over his soul must have been as marvelous to himself as to us. His anointed eyes beheld afar off the country he was so soon to enter, and the rich fragrance of his words so transformed the death room that each one present could say—"It is good for me that I am here,"—and there came upon him a spirit as of prophecy constraining him to its purpose. "Susan," said he to me, as we were alone, "the hopes you are cherishing will never be realized—but God will bring light out of darkness. What we know not now we shall know hereafter; trust Him in the sternest hour. My poor, poor Alice! Oh, beauty is a fearful dower,—smooth her passage to the tomb, Susan, as you have mine,—love and labor will brighten your after years."

An hour passed and my father was not, for God had taken him.

We were orphans, and but two. Life lay before us like a dim field enwrapped in twilight; the arras of the future had amid their foldings vague and uncertain figures, but God was our trust. First, we desired to pay up the mortgage against our place, and defray other expenses that had been necessarily incurred. Alice was a fine scholar, and soon had a situation offered her in the village school, so that she could teach and board at home. We took boarders, and I did plain sewing and whatever else opportunity offered. Sometimes we were weary. It was hard bearing the heat and burden of life alone.—After three years of toil the day dawned that saw our last debt canceled, and that night we knelt to our prayers with a gratitude and gladness that words failed to express. Alice had been so occupied with teaching and home duties that she paid little heed to the claims of society—but this could not hide her, and though she sought not the distinction, was an acknowledged beauty and belle. Many who did nothing but dress and dance, watched the gentle, care-burdened girl with jealous eyes. She was of queenly style, and in all her manners were a winning grace and high-born dignity. The aged loved her, and the children every morning filled their hands with sweetest flowers to put upon her table.

We still wore mourning. It had been our purpose to remove it the year before,

but one morning in rosy June, when we were talking about summer dresses of soft, cheerful hues, a letter was handed me written by an unknown pen. It said that a new grave had been made in the far-off West, on the Pacific shore, and a young stranger slept therein to waken no more till the morning of the resurrection.—Though a score of years has since gone by, deepening the imprints of care, and thought, and feeling, on my forehead, flecking my hair with silver, giving birth to other hopes and other joys, yet I still wear black, unless it be sometimes when I go out to socials or to the minister's for a tea-drinking, when Philip, "that child," will say, "Come, Auntie, please wear your striped silk, and that pretty head dress, you look so young in them;" and to please the boy I put them on, though you may think, old woman and old maid as I am, that it is for the latter words instead.

With the reading of that letter came a darkness that no language can express.—The room of my heart had not a ray of light only as the faint glimmerings of immortal hope strayed through them; yet I was willing to live few or many years in sorrow and alone, if thereby my mission might be fulfilled. Alice at the time was twenty-two. For her, my noble, my beautiful sister, I thought that life had some bright crown—some precious gifts.

An artist from an eastern city had been in our village for months, and his visits at our home were becoming very frequent. Philip Elbridge Corydon was a man who stood high in his profession. Accustomed to the best circles of society, no wonder he could sway and fascinate with such resistless power in our midst. His language and manners were elegant; his character, so far as we saw or could judge, was bright and symmetrical; and when he turned from the flatteries and admirings of the rich, and knelt with his dower of gifts at the heart of Alice, repeating in fervid tones the old scripture phrase—"Lovest thou me?" how could the spell-bound girl reply other than from the same text—"Thou knowest that I love thee!"—even though a shadow from the prophecy of the dying flitted before her.

During the tenth month of their acquaintance they were married. I looked upon my brother-in-law with great pride, but with a nameless, unspoken fear. After a tour of some weeks they returned—Mr. Corydon renewing his professional duties, and Alice, in his society and freedom from