

## LUCY LARCOM.

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS, IN "NEW YORK INDEPENDENT."

It was the softest September day that ever blessed New England. It was a day of celestial skies and golden hazes and fiery foliage—a day when the very rocks seemed to melt before the eyes, and all hard outlines to move and waver as if they sought to merge themselves in mist, and cloud and sea. It was one of the days when the material struggles toward the spiritual so subtly yet so surely, that one can see it between the half-closed eyelids and hear it between one's heart-beats. It was the day when our great Christian poet was borne to his burial.

The funeral of Whittier was in some respects one of the most extraordinary of our times. It differed from the great urban funeral scenes as much as his peaceful rural life differed from the histories of men who move and have their being in town, and travel, and public appearance and electric action. As we all remember, the last scenes that honored him were enacted in the open air in his own garden, with the autumn flowers burning about, and the late birds singing above.

The Quaker form of service, quaint, old-fashioned, assured, and indifferent to the opinions of "the world," went peacefully its appointed way, to its leisurely end; and by the ceremonials of his own faith he was buried, as he had chosen. All day the common people whom he loved, and who loved him, poured in and out of the threshold of his simple Amesbury home; thousands upon thousands of them to take a last look at his precious face.

It was, above all else, a people's funeral. As one watched the press and mass of faces, one felt that here was the kind of tribute, which, out of all others, one would prefer for the last which human regret should offer on one's burial day.

In deference, perhaps, to the wishes of his literary friends, or to his well-known sympathy with the higher interests of thoughtful women, whose advancement he had so long and so chivalrously championed, a pleasant departure from the conventional thing was arranged in the choice of his honorary bearers. Among these were numbered four women, all personal friends of his—Mrs. Governor Claflin, Mrs. Alice Freeman Palmer, and the writer of this. We three are left. The fourth has just dropped beside us—the first of his bearers, and, so far as I know, the first of his old friends to follow him.

As I sat in Trinity Church to-day, listening to the triumphant Episcopal burial service, and to the joyful hymns chosen to celebrate her release from a life which she herself has done so much to make cheerful and strong, and in which she herself had so limited a share of human joy—I thought of that September sky and that garden funeral.

When the flower-covered casket—not black but quiet gray, "like Lucy," and when the mourners—none of them clad in mourning—passed down the broad aisle to the strains of one of Trinity's most ringing chants, I recalled the likeness (for there was a likeness, no matter how deep their differences) between the great poet and his sister singer. They were lifelong friends; and as she was borne out into the gray April day, from the sombre church interior I could almost hear him say in the hearty tones which so many of his chosen friends will so well recall: "Well, Lucy, I am glad thee've come!"

It was impossible to leave the historic church—from whose aisles but a few weeks since its own great pastor was borne for the last time amid the tears of fifteen thousand people—without giving our thoughts to another of the friends of her whom we were there to honor to-day. It is said that, when his last illness fell upon Bishop Brooks, Miss Larcom, herself then stricken with mortal disease, caused a few written words of sympathy to be sent to him; and, in that little note she said that she would never see him again in this world: "But we shall soon meet in the next."

He was then too spent to write; but, the word goes, that he was able to send a message in answer to her farewell signal.

Thus, in the solemn brotherhood of the believers' trust and joy, the great souls pass.

The literary career of Lucy Larcom has

been an interesting one from certain points of view peculiar to herself. She stands in our thoughts for two things—the power of the innate poetic gift to fight its way to the front, and the power of a devout life to elevate the poetic gift.

As we all know, she began at heavy odds. The picture of the young girl in the factory at Lowell, dreaming over the loom, whose toil should purchase education, is one which we have long respected. The silken song of the daintiest of literary aristocrats would not dare take on an accent of condescension toward that simple, patient, laborious youth. Its results were too valuable to be ignored. One of the haughtiest of our critics said of one of her later books: "There is something here which we do not mind calling genius."

We pass the phrase with the smile which it deserves; and yet the memory returns to it with pertinacity. Grant the tone of half-grudged respect with which a poet of the people is received, when she chances to be a woman and a Christian, too—yet perhaps the words compress as well as any might the literary estimate of Miss Larcom's work.



LUCY LARCOM.

A great poet she was not; nor did her modest, sweet spirit ever so account herself. A poet she was; and, out of the bars of a life not wholly nor easily set to music, she evolved strains that will linger in our literature—it would be idle to prophesy for how long or how short a time. She sang as the birds beside the Merrimack do—because she could not help it. Her medium of expression was thoroughly musical, fluent and finished. She did not toil nor spin to "make poetry." It sprang from her soul as spontaneously as the current of a stream goes over a cascade. The beauty of her work lay in its naturalness. That it was her nature to be hopeful, cheerful, wholesome and inspiring decided the direction of her special uses; for that these were real and wide is not to be doubted.

Yet when we have said this, we wonder how much her public would have been narrowed had she not been the devout writer that she was. "Hannah binding Shoes," is a good ballad and deserves its popularity; but the religious poems of her later life rise to a strength, and enforce a respect far surpassing that shown by, or shown to her folklore. These last are enviable for their dignity, their symmetry and their usefulness. Many of them rise to inspiration as unquestionably as anything in our devotional literature.

By the old rhetorical rule that, other things being equal, that is the highest works which treat the highest sub-

ject, Miss Larcom has made the most of her gift, and her works will follow her. The people love her, for she knew how to sing to them. Christians read her, for she expressed them. The doubting and the troubled seek her, for she uplifted them.

Hers has been a good work, balanced and beautiful in spirit; cultivated in expression, and consecrated in aim. She has been dear to thousands, and she will be missed. I would rather have her fame than that of many a poet called greater, as undedicated criticism calls greatness, whose regal gift has been made plebeian by paltry metrical experiments, by mythological mires or doubtful, modern morals, or soulless and aimless imagery. She is no "idle singer of an empty day." Her most human poems—those on Friendship, which we all know—have a serious and a sacred touch:

"A friend,—it is another name for God.  
Whose love inspires all love, is all in all.  
Profane it not, lest lowest shame befall!  
Worship no idol, whether star or clod!  
Nor think that any friend is truly thine.  
Save as life's closest link with Love Divine."

Her hymns take us to clear and sunlit

heights, on which and of which we can always say: It is good to be here.

"O God, how beautiful is life,  
Since Thou its soul and sweetness art!  
How dies its childish fret and strife.  
On Thy all-harmonizing heart!"

"One soul with Thee for evermore,  
Borne high beyond the gulfs of death—  
A joy that ripples on thy shore—  
With Life's vast hymn I blend my breath."

"Joy, joy to see from every shore  
Whereon my step makes pressure fond,  
Thy sunrise, reddening still before!  
More light, more love, more life beyond!"

## A FRUIT-BEARING BRANCH.

Polly Percy was older and wiser in many respects than she was when she started on her journey heavenward; yet many a stumble she had on the rough, old path to the goal. And even now, though for six long years she had been toiling steadily onward, she sometimes felt herself to be as far as ever from the desired haven. This she told Miss Merry one day, and that lady though sympathetic, smiled a little at Polly's woe-begone face.

"So it is a tiresome way?" she said, holding the younger girl's hands.

"Yes, it is," Polly admitted sorrowfully; "and the worst of it is, I don't bear fruit, Miss Merry."

"You mix metaphors, Polly," smiled the other. "And do you really want to bear fruit to His honor, dear?"

Polly nodded. "I don't suppose any

one would think so—but I hoped you would. And I've tried—why, Miss Merry, every morning I take one of the fruits—gentleness or peace or patience, or some one; then I try to add to my faith virtue, and so on; a fresh one every day till all are taken, and then I begin over again. But it's no use. I don't succeed; I'm just as cross and impatient as ever. Now this morning I took charity, and then accused Lorrie of trying to parade her honesty when she owned she whispered in class. Oh, it's no use!"

Again Miss Merry smiled, but this time her sweet blue eyes almost overflowed as she folded her arms about poor Polly.

"Don't," she said, "don't say that. He will give thee the desires of thy heart, dear girl, and he says he will purify unto himself a peculiar people. But are you working in the right way, my Polly? Christ is the Vine and you are—what?"

"A branch."

"And now does a branch bear fruit?"

"By abiding in him; and I do try!"

"One moment, please. And if a branch—one of those, there—is to bear grapes, what must be the condition?"

"It must be joined to a vine."

"And then what makes the fruit grow?"

"Why, the life of the vine, of course,"

Polly said, with a puzzled air; what was all this leading to?

"But suppose it doesn't plan to bear any grapes?"

"Why, of course it doesn't plan, it just bears them; it has to, if it is joined to the vine."

"And," said Miss Merry, closing the nature lesson, "and dear, if we are 'joined to the Vine,' we do not need to plan to bear fruit—the fruit comes; not always as quickly as perhaps we expect, but in the right time, and that time will come more quickly according as the life of the Vine is in us. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ,' he is none of his, dear Polly, and 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.'"

"What a foolish branch I've been!" sighed Polly. "But, Miss Merry, how shall I be able to have that life in me?—do tell me."

And the wiser, older Christian, answered soberly, yet with a glad light in her eyes and a joyfully triumphant note in her voice: "Polly, Jesus is the Word; he says he is come that we, Polly Percy and Merry Lambert, may have life, and that we may have it more abundantly; dear, you and I must let the word of Christ dwell in us."

And Polly has given up trying to bear fruit; and people are beginning to see in her life rich clusters of the fruits of the Spirit, of which one is peace.—*Well-Spring.*

## DON'TS FOR CHRISTIANS.

Don't speak impatiently to children.

Don't go where you cannot ask Jesus to go with you.

Don't get so far away from home that you have to leave your religion behind you.

Don't forget that no matter where you are somebody is looking at you.

Don't go where you would not be willing to die.

Don't give advice to others that you are not willing to follow.

Don't look where you know it isn't safe to walk.

Don't go where you would not have your children to follow you.

Don't go to sleep until you can forgive everybody.—*Ram's Horn.*

## LINE UPON LINE.

It is so much harder to lodge spiritual truth in the human mind than secular or scientific, that the Bible teacher must needs give "line upon line, and precept upon precept." Begin the new lesson by reviewing the past, sometimes for several weeks past, when the lessons are on the same line. Then sum up as you proceed to add the new truths, and at the close sum up and review on all points made, and present the lesson as a whole.—*Sunday School Teacher.*

## DO IT NOW.

"Do it now the kindly deed,  
Speak it now, the cheering word;  
Some one waits; maybe his need  
Presses sorely. Good deferred,  
Robs of half its blis'nt intent,  
Giver and recipient."