

"Very bright, William."

"Open the blinds, please, and let the sunshine in at the east window."

Mary Spencer's heart stood still within her, but she commanded her voice, and answered steadily:—

"They are open, William. The whole room is full of light."

"Mary, I cannot see; the time's come; I am alone in the darkness."

"Not alone, my love," she cried in a passion of grief, and pity, and tenderness. Then she went and sat down beside him and the bed, and drew his head to her bosom, and comforted him, just as she was wont to comfort her children. After a time her tender caresses, her soothing tones, seemed to have healed his bruised, tortured heart. He lifted up her head and kissed her, his first from out the darkness in which he must abide, and then he sent her away. I think every soul, standing face to face with an untried calamity, longs to be for a space alone with its God.

Three hours after that the church bells rang, and, as usual, the minister and his wife walked out of their dwelling, save that now he leaned upon her arm. In that hour of seclusion he had made up his mind what to do. They walked up the familiar way, and she left him at the foot of the pulpit stairs, and went back to her pew in front. He groped up the stairs, and then rising in his place, he spoke to the wondering congregation.

"Brethren, I stand before you as one on whom the Father's hand has fallen heavily. I am blind. I shall never see you again in this world—you, my children—for whose souls I have striven so long; I have looked my last on your kind, familiar faces on this earth—see to it that I miss none of you when my eyes are unsealed again in Heaven. Grant, O Father, that of those whom Thou hast given me I may lose none.

There was not a tearless face among those which were lifted toward him, as he stood there with his sightless eyes raised to Heaven, his hands outstretched, as if to bring down on them the blessing for which he prayed. Some of the women sobbed audibly, but the minister was calm. After a moment he said:—

"My brethren, as far as possible, the services will proceed as usual.

Then, in a clear voice, in which there seemed to his listeners' ears some unearthly sweetness, he recited the one hundred and thirteenth Psalm, commencing:—

"Out of the deep I have called upon thee, O Lord; Lord hear my voice."

Afterward he gave out the first line of a hymn, which the congregation sang. Then he prayed, and some said who heard him, the eyes closed on earth were surely beholding the beautiful vision, for he spoke as a son beloved, whose very soul was full of the glory of the Father's presence.

The sermon which followed was such an one as they had never before heard from his lips. There was power in it, a fervor, a tenderness no words of mine can describe. It was the testimony of a living witness, who has found the Lord a very present help in the time of trouble.

When all was over, and he came down the pulpit stairs, his wife stood again at the foot, and he took her arm and went out silently. He seemed to the waiting congregation as one set apart and consecrated by the anointing of a special sorrow, and they dared not break the holy silence around him with common speech.