

The Family Circle.

THE OLD VIOLINIST.

When the old man times the swing of his bow
To the flow of his favorite tune,
And he hears the voice of the long ago
In the ripples of sweet "Bonnie Doon,
And his pale cheeks flush with a rosier glow
Like the clouds of a fall afternoon,
There's a plaintive wail to the rhythmic flow
Of the dear old songs that our mothers know
Like the loving croon when the sun is low
Of a dove in the month of June.

When his fingers thrum the forgotten strings
For the tunes his grandfather played,
Till the poor old tormented violin sings
The strains of the "White Cockade,"
And the songs that float on the bluebird's wings
In his deaf ears warble and fade,
There's a thrill in the graybeard's touch that
brings
The clasp of the waist in the waltz that flings
The blood to his heart like the kiss that clings
To the lips of an amorous maid

When he tips the bridge to his listening ear
For the chords that swing thereon,
And he feels a kiss on his thin white hair,
For his "Jo John Anderson,"
And the frost melts out of the flosses there
The winters of life have spun,
There's a tender dream in the sweet old air
Of a rush of lips when cheeks were fair,
Like a dash of rain when fields are bare
And parched in the autumn sun.

When his hale old frame swings to and fro
Like the trunk of a swaying pine,
And the friends of his boyhood come and go
To the notes of "Auld Lang Syne,"
And his comrade's call is a weak hallo
That faints to a farewell sign,
There's a touch on the strings as soft as snow
In the sighing pines where the shadows grow
When to dying ears the night winds blow
The moan of the shivering kine.

—Edwards S. Hopkins in Judge

ONLY A MUSIC TEACHER.

BY MRS. A. C. VARIN.

Caroline Hunter was a faithful attendant of the church of St. Stephen's. No one spoke to her or even noticed her. Sunday after Sunday she would return to her seat in the gallery, and humbly gather up and treasure the words of counsel and admonition that fell from the lips of the eloquent preacher, Dr. David Rutherford.

Dr. Rutherford was not only an eloquent, but a godly man.

His speech was rough at times, almost fierce, then tender and imploring. His ministry was looked upon as eminently successful. The roll of communicants reached as high as eight hundred.

Sunday after Sunday throngs crowded in to enjoy his eloquence, to smile a little at his strange earnestness, to return into the fashionable world from which they came, and forget all about it, but Caroline Hunter would listen with beating heart and throbbing pulse, and after receiving the blessing with bowed head, would go forth strong to fight the battle of life.

Caroline had wandered through the open doors with the unconscious simplicity of a country girl that first lonely Sunday after her arrival in the city, and the impassioned eloquence of the preacher, the sweet thrilling voice of the high-priced tenor had brought her back, until now it had grown into a necessary habit—the feast of her soul from week to week, the refreshing shower that fell upon her young life, causing it to blossom forth into fragrance and beauty.

But Dr. Rutherford was not thinking of the lonely black-robed figure in the back seat of the gallery as he delivered his famous discourses but rather of that quiet, composed multitude in the cushioned pews whose faces were ever lifted towards him in unbroken serenity.

These faces were familiar to him; men and women's faces—members of his flock; he knew the lives of its brilliant women, its thoughtless young girls, its busy merchants and brokers, all rushing on heedlessly, recklessly, giving no thought toward that higher spiritual life for which his soul yearned, and for which in the flush and ecstasy of youth he had renounced a distinguished career.

Thus month after month the deep billows of his nature would rise in great waves and beat themselves against this wall of apathy and indifference. When he returned to his place he would bow his head in his hands and cry out in the agony of his spirit—"How long, O Lord, how long!" and then bowing his head even lower he would groan—"It is retribution!" and as the pleading, thrilling voice of the high-priced tenor rose and fell, it seemed to him in these moments that the waters of Marah were seeping over his soul.

The owners of the rustling dresses would whisper one to another—"Isn't it touching to see him pray as he does after the sermon; so effective, so picturesque!"

But his two daughters, quiet, sad faced girls, in deep mourning, would sigh and murmur—"Poor father! He is thinking of brother Edward."

There were rumours afloat that shortly after the death of the minister's wife, the only son had disappeared—extravagance and gambling debts had come to light—there had been no mother's gentle voice to interfere.

It was the old story—words spoken in anger by the justly irate father, a proud bitter retort from the high-spirited son, and then the boy had gone out into the storm, vowing never to return. Since then, two years ago, no tidings had reached them. The motherless girls—their young faces prematurely sad—met their father morning after morning with brave cheerfulness. They noticed the feverish anxiety with which he sorted over the letters, the quick sigh, and the look of quiet despair that finally settled into the agony of an ever-present, unspoken sorrow.

Through this gnawing, self-accusing heartache the heart of the pastor, the father of his flock, grew more tender, his exhortations more earnest, positively vibrating with the thrill of human sympathy, only called forth from the deep sounding chords of self-suffering and self-knowledge.

Again and again, as he glanced into the sea of faces uplifted to his, waiting for the first word, a pang shot through his heart as he recalled that young boyish face, the face of his only son, that he had not seen for so many weary months. How proud, how handsome, how manly it had looked that stormy December night, as with head thrown back and lips drawn and quivering he had said—

"Father, I have done wrong. I have asked your forgiveness; you will not listen to me. You are cruel, unjust."

And then the lad had left, and when he, the father, had held out his arms and said, "My son, return," it was too late.

Cruel! Unjust! He had never forgotten those words. They had sent his lad out into the world without money, without friends, without home—and since then the burden of his cry—the pause in his prayer—the quiver in his voice as he blessed the kneeling multitude, was ever the muttered "My boy, my boy! come back to me!"

Dr. Rutherford was about to close the little meeting held once a week in the side chapel of the great church. A score or more of earnest workers were gathered together—the cherished lambs of his flock. He knew them—zealous, noble-hearted, self-sacrificing Christian men and women. What should he say to them? he asked himself in bitter humility. Urge them to greater zeal? But as he glanced about him, he noticed the presence of strangers—women with placid, expressionless, vain countenances. As usual his heart burned within him, and with that fire which they called eloquence, and which had the power to please even if it did not stir their calm pulses, he spoke out in his rough, fierce way; he looked straight into those proud, cold eyes, and spoke to all as if to each one alone; he urged them to awake from their apathy, to use their wealth, their culture, their refinement to the glory of God.

"You all possess some gift, some talent. I don't know what it is; you do; God does!" he cried in passionate vehemence,

"and of that talent on the great reckoning day He will demand a strict account. Present it to your God. It is His most precious gift. Plant it, cherish it. Some day it will bring forth fruit meet for the Master's use."

"What can I do? What shall I do?" repeated Caroline Hunter as she wended her way to the crowded street on the East Side, where she had her home. "Alas, I have no gift, no talent!"

What was she? Only a poor little music teacher earning her daily bread among the rich. Her story was a simple one. When her father, a man of more than ordinary talent, was stricken with paralysis, it followed, as a matter of course, that Caroline with her sweet fresh voice, whose sweetness and freshness were so well known that it had become common property in the village, should take the burden of the common support upon her shoulders, by teaching music and singing in her native village and the neighbouring town.

The earnest, conscientious teacher, with her firm yet gentle manner, had a number of regular pupils at the great fashionable hotel during the season, and when a year ago the great blow came and her beloved father was laid away, what more natural than that, in her first terrible loneliness, she should listen to one of her patrons and decide to follow her pupils to the city, where at least a living was secured and old ties were severed. That was a year ago, and she had lived a lonely, busy life and yet contented, coming and going among her pupils, gaining strength and courage from the great preacher's passionate speech—offering her solitude, her tears, her vague aspirations on the altar of her Christ—her pure and beautiful life rising fair and spotless as a lily amidst the turmoil and sin of the great city.

In the evening she would sit at her little old-fashioned piano and play the music taught to her by her father—the masterpieces of the great masters, Beethoven, Handel, Mozart. That evening, after taking off her hat and cloak, she knelt for a moment by the side of her snowy bed and breathed a prayer that her talent might be revealed to her. As she arose, she looked across at the crowded tenement, at the careless, laughing faces at the windows—the street was so narrow she could see the children in the dim lamplight playing on the floor, the fathers with tankards of frothing ale, the mothers laughing and talking loudly. On this beautiful day of early summer had one of them thought of God? What was her talent? Was it to overcome her timidity, to plead with these rough-voiced men, these hard-visaged women? Would they understand her faltering speech if she said out of the fulness of her grateful heart—"Seek God, love Him, praise Him, serve Him. He is joy and rest and peace." Would they not mock her simple words? No, no; she possessed no gift. "Sing! Caroline Hunter, you can sing." She started and hid her face in her hands as though a voice had spoken. Yes, she could sing, but she had not lifted her voice in song since her father's death. Could that be her talent, her little gift to be used for her Master—the voice her father had loved and trained, the voice that had lulled him to sleep! "Your voice will never be great, Caroline," he had said, "but it will reach human hearts, and that is better."

"Yes, I will sing to-night," she said simply; "I will sing for God."

And then she took her hymn-book and sat near the open window, where she appeared in the semi darkness, with her pure face and earnest eyes like some painting of St. Cecilia.

The voice was low and faltering at first, but as she turned over the leaves the beauty of the sweet, simple melodies and words entered her heart, and her tones grew richer, stronger, and floated on the summer air into the noisy tenement beyond. Many a loud voice silenced its coarse retort to listen—mothers tired, worn-out, embittered, hushed the unruly children, and for the first time many a babe fell asleep lulled to rest by the melody of a hymn.

At one of the upper windows a young man started up as the sweet, thrilling voice reached his ears, and leaned against the casement. His face was set and hardened, seamed with lines of care and anxiety, a look of despair darkened his eyes—although young his hair was already streaked with gray. The scowl deepened upon his brow as he listened. He muttered under his breath—"It was unjust, cruel, and I was so young, so young. No, no; I cannot forgive or forget. One kind word and I should have been saved these years of wretchedness and sin."

What was that voice so sweet, so penetrating, saying now? How distinctly the words fell upon his ear. "My son, return," pleadingly, wailingly. Would it never cease? "Return, my son, my son!" When was the last time he had heard these words? Ah, how well he recalled the scene—the comfortable family room, the two weeping girls, two angry voices, his own and his father's, then the ominous silence and he had fled from the brightness and warmth into the darkness of the beating storm, but not before he had heard that last cry of love and forgiveness—"My son, return."

But he had said, "I will never return." So he had rushed on, facing the keen wind, in spite of his heartache. But ever during past years in hours of wretchedness and despair, in scenes of midnight revelry, he had heard that cry—"My son, my son." Poor father! Had he changed? Did he miss his face in the church looking up to him from the accustomed seat? As that father stood in the pulpit, so noble, so commanding, so earnest, how often he, the son, had repeated with a thrill of love—"I am proud of my father, I will make my father proud of me." Ah, how wretchedly he had failed! He looked about him with a shudder—the bare, miserable room of the little tenement—his own home how bright and even beautiful it was. How plainly he could recall each picture on the wall, the chairs, the table. The week day meeting was just about over now, and they were gathered together for the evening prayer. Did they ever speak of him? the two absent ones, the mother's place empty, his place empty. His mother, what made him think of his dead mother? He had schooled himself to banish that sad, beautiful memory. Why, he was crying like a child!

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on,"

rang out the penetrating voice with its pathetic quiver. When was it he had last heard those words? Was it at the bedside with the calm pale face bravely smiling between the gasping breath? Was it Lena who was sobbing, or Helen? Which of the two was singing with pitiless sweetness—

"The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on."

And then came the hoarse, broken voice that was father's—"Hush, children, mother is in heaven. The angels will finish the hymn."

Father had suddenly grasped his hand as if seeking help, and he, the weak, foolish boy, had in that moment become a man. In the sudden flash of this new-born strength he had said to himself, "I will confess my sin to father. I will lead a different life hereafter as mother would have me."

And at the funeral again, in the great crowd, amidst the heavy fragrance of flowers a voice like this had thrilled him—

"I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou
Shouldst lead me on."

And then had come the quarrel and its bitter ending. He here, his father there, his mother in heaven. Sweetly, softly, tenderly came the words through the silence of the summer evening—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee."

O, he was far away from God, far away from father, far from mother, far from home.

The young man fell upon his knees—"O God forgive me!" he cried "Father, I will return, receive thy erring child."