

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## A LIFE'S FAILURE.

(By Nurse Nina.)

It was a sentence I heard a lady say on board the Queen at Sydney, that made me think of calling the story that, ma'am.

"Poor Mr. Chalmers," she said; "his life has been a failure, and now he is going home to die. It is a sad story!"

I did not know then who Mr. Chalmers was, and I wondered. That was on Saturday. The next day there was service in the saloon, and I heard them say Mr. Chalmers would preach if he was able.

I looked up when the clergyman came forward in his white surplice. The sun was slanting through the portholes just above his head. He had fair, reddish-gold hair, very light and fluffy, and somehow with his pale, beautiful face, and the white folds of his gown I got quite a start. I thought he looked like a picture once I'd seen in London of the Angel Gabriel. I can't tell you what made me think of it. It was the delicate white face, as strong, and yet so sweet, and the fair hair, and the sun made it like an aureole, as I think they call it, just as the angel had round his head in the picture.

His text was this—I shall never forget either text or sermon: "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them; for the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

Somehow, as he began, I remembered the lady saying he was "a failure." I wondered why. I had never heard just such a sermon, though it was very quiet and simple. I think some clergymen have a way of sending you away feeling as if God were very near, and there are others again that fairly maze you, and there are others that give you a stone instead of bread.

After the sermon he seemed very done up. Death was written on his face, and I don't know for my part how he preached at all; and I heard the doctor say he would not permit it again.

"Very well, I shall rest," Mr. Chalmers said, and smiled. "For I do want to get home, and not startle my mother by looking too bad. I will be obedient, doctor."

I was surprised to hear him speak so cheerily. Get home? Would he ever see home?

There was a passenger on board called Browne, and one night I heard a bit of talk between him and a friend which set me thinking. They were having some iced drinks in the saloon, and their voices came along the passage when I was making up the beds in the cabin. The others were on deck enjoying the fine night.

"I had to send Edith home first," Mr. Browne said, "while I remained to settle up. We weren't going to stay out in the colony—not much!—after Uncle George left us that money. Very much better six months of Europe than 'a cycle of Cathy' to my mind. And it's just as well she went by an earlier boat."

"Why?"

"Well, you know, our marriage was a bit awkward. Edith came out to marry another fellow—a clergyman; but, unfortunately for him, poor chap, she fancied me en route, and as I was awfully gone on her, there was only one thing to be done. We got married, and then she wrote and told him. He got the letter just as he was starting to meet her, for we got in earlier than we expected."

"Phew! Did he make a shindy?"

"No. But the worst is, the poor beggar is here—on board, and they say he is dying."

There was a pause then.

"Chalmers?"

"Yes. He's been unlucky all through. He was a bit too good for the rough gold-diggers he was amongst, and got knocked down one night trying to save a woman from being struck in a drunken brawl. They let him lie all night in the rain with a broken leg, and the chill settled on his lungs. So he had to throw it all up and come home. I don't like the business, for he doesn't know me—doesn't connect the two Brownes; and somehow I have taken an odd fancy for the poor chap. 'Pon my word, I don't see what Edie preferred in me. But, then, there's no accounting for women's tastes."

"No, that's true," the other agreed.

"Maybe she preferred the sinner to the saint; some of 'em do."

"Saint or no, he's true grit. I don't like the business at all. 'Pon my word, I go about feeling like a thief!"

I couldn't help watching these two after that. Mr. Browne sat next the young clergyman at table, and Mr. Chalmers talked to him a good deal. He was always bright. He took a deal of interest in the day's run, though he never betted on it, as the others did. Indeed, he seemed to take an interest in everything. He went and talked to the crew, and preached on Sunday to the second-class. With that look on his face—plain, for all his brightness—the men listened to him as I never knew them listen to anyone before.

One woman in the second-class lost her baby, and it was buried at sea. She sat cold and stony till Mr. Chalmers went and talked to her, and then I heard her sobbing in her cabin.

"He's like one of God's angels!" she said.

"If God is kinder than him, then I can trust the baby to Him very well."

We got on smoothly, with pretty calm weather; but, in spite of that we could all see that Mr. Chalmers got weaker and weaker. They say it's a symptom of his disease, not to see how near one is to death. He did not. He never talked as though he were ill at all.

When he knew I was Yorkshire, he'd speak to me a lot about Scarborough, where his mother lived, and where he had been born, and partly brought up.

"Mother and I are going back to Scarborough," he said. "Do you know Scarborough, stewardess?"

"Yes, sir; I lived there once for a year in service. It's a fine place."

"It is the most beautiful town in the world," he said. "In my dreams I always see it, with the blue sea, and with the gold of the sky bright behind the castle rock. I've seen it from the sands like the City of Gold. I'd like to die there. Mother is to meet me, and we will go straight there, if it is God's will!"

Poor soul! I thought, as I looked at his thin, white face, and heard his hacking cough, that he would never see Scarborough. He would see the real Golden City, but never an earthly one.

The heat tried him very much. He was very ill in the Indian Ocean, and I think it was about here that he lost hope. For some days he was very dull and quiet, and my heart ached for him. He was weak, and sick, and suffering.

One Sunday night—and it was so hot that the gentlemen went about with their waistcoats open, and called for iced drinks—the doctor had carried him upon deck, and he lay there with his white thin face laid back on a cushion. He seemed too ill and languid to speak. He was Mr. Browne, coming up, sat down by him suddenly, and

took up the big palm-leaf fan, and he began to fan him.

"You are very good!" Mr. Chalmers whispered. But he seemed almost too weary to speak. People talk about the valley of the shadow, ma'am; but I don't think we always go through the valley of the shadow just at the very end of life. I think some of us pass through it before that. I was thinking his soul was amongst the shadows that night, and his bright faith was fading a little. I would have given anything to have helped him, but what could I say?

And then suddenly a Miss Vichy, who had been sitting with her hands clasped round her knees on the top of the companion, began to sing softly to herself. All the others were on the lower deck looking at something. There were only four on deck. I had been fanning him before Mr. Browne came. She sang, "Art thou weary, art thou languid?"

It was a very sweet, soft air, not the usual one, and I never heard a sweeter voice. And at one verse Mr. Chalmers opened his eyes, and a sort of flicker of joy and understanding crossed his face.

"If I find Him, if I follow,

What His goodness here?

"Many a sorrow, many a labor,  
Many a tear."

If I still hold closely to Him,  
What hath He at last?

"Sorrow vanquish'd, labor ended,  
Jordan past!"

She stopped, then, and, getting up, walked slowly away. I don't suppose she ev' knew God had put it into her heart to sing just those words.

"Sorrow vanquished, labor ended, Jordan past!"

Mr. Chalmers whispered the words, then looked up at the other with a bright smile. He, too, always seemed to like Mr. Browne.

"I was down in the deeps, I think," he said. "And those words were God's message to me."

"Do you believe them?"

Mr. Browne spoke in a kind of hoarse voice, and Mr. Chalmers answered, with his look far away:

"Thank God, I do!"

"Have you vanished all your sorrow?"

"I did not! He did it for me!"

"Chalmers," said the other suddenly, "I've always thought a lot of clergy in these days don't really believe half they preach! I know a fellow with a good parish and a fine stipend—he don't believe it. But he says it don't do anyone any harm if it is only a poetical dream, or one illusion more!"

I could see Mr. Chalmers' thin face flush.

"Man," he said, "one doesn't die for a dream! One doesn't live for a dream!"

"You believe it, then, on your soul? That it can do that—brighten life, and make death easy?"

"On my soul! It has done that for It will help you to understand."

The other moved uneasily; but he waited and listened.

"I come out to Australia with high hopes. The girl I was to marry was to follow me whenever I got settled; and I loved her more than my life! Well, I needn't tell you the struggles of the first years, but at last things got smoother a bit, and she came. I had done all I could for our home. I used to sit up at nights, carpentering and painting. I was the happiest man in the colony! Nothing troubled me. She was coming!"

"And then—I was starting to go and meet the ship, and—she had—married