

"No, dear Lurline, you must not speak of hopelessness; that word has been obliterated in every spiritual sense by the cross of Christ. I came here to-day to give you a message, which I think will help you, from one who already knows the full secret of the love of God. Tell me, Laura, where do you suppose John Pemberton to be at this moment?"

"Oh, poor fellow, I am sure I do not know! living at home perhaps, or reading for orders somewhere, trying to redeem the time he wasted on me. Of all my evil deeds, Mary, my conduct to John Pemberton was that which terrified me the most, when I believed I was going then and there before the judgment-seat of Christ. I know that I did him a deadly injury by drawing him away from all his holy aspirations, and then I deceived and betrayed him after all, and sent him from me in despair. Oh, I was far more cruel to him than to Bertrand, for he loved me truly, and I do not think your husband ever really did. Wherever John is now, I am sure he must be thinking of me with the bitterest hatred and contempt."

"Oh, Laura, how much you are mistaken," said Mary, softly. "Dear John is even now at the feet of his beloved Lord; in His bright immediate presence, and there, I doubt not, if he is permitted to do so, he prays for you as ardently, as incessantly, as he did while still he struggled through the shadows of this twilight world."

"Mary, what do you mean?" exclaimed Laura, starting from her reclining position; "where is John? not dead—oh, say he is not dead!"

"Dead to this mortal state, but alive unto God for evermore," said Mary, reverently.

"Then I shall never see him again, to ask him to forgive me, as I fully meant to do?" said Lurline, falling back sadly on her pillows. "Oh, Mary, I am justly punished for my cruelty towards him! I thought nothing of it at the time, when I was only straining every nerve to escape at any cost from Chiverley and the dull monotony of my unmarried life; but the sense of my unkindness to poor John Pemberton was brought home to me when I found myself the wife of a man who married me to suit his own convenience, and in the midst of persons who called themselves my friends for the sake of promoting their personal interests, and whose pretended attachment to me was as false and hollow as that with which I had mocked the devotion of his true and tender heart. I was stung with remorse concerning him even then, before I had been brought face to face with death and judgment, and I made the most earnest resolution that I would try to be a true friend to him in all the years to come. I looked forward most anxiously to meeting him again, for that very purpose; and now, all in a moment, I hear that it is for ever impossible; it may be a just decree, no doubt I have deserved it; but it is almost unendurable to feel that the one who loved me more than any one else ever did should have parted from me for the last time on earth in such exceeding bitterness."

"There was no bitterness in his feelings towards you at the last, Laura; of that I am quite certain from the manner in which he spoke to me of you a very short time before his death; but I do not believe that he ever at any time cherished an unkind thought of you, even when he was in the midst of his keenest suffering."

"He did suffer much, then, by my conduct, as I feared; tell me all you know of him from the time he left Chiverley. I never heard a word about him after that last letter he wrote to my father. Was he

very unhappy, Mary? I want to know all the truth."

"I will not hide it from you, Laura, though I fear it must pain you to hear it. He was indeed almost broken-hearted then; but it was rather because he had fallen from his pure allegiance to his Saviour than from the utter loss and ruin that had fallen on his earthly love; his remorseful penitence drove him to test himself by serving God in some severe and painful way, before he dared allow himself to enter on the sacred duties of his first vocation as a clergyman; for this reason he came to Paris to work among the sick and wounded of the war, which was, of course, a task full of danger and self-sacrifice."

"To Paris! then was it there he died? and were you near him at the time? how did it happen, Mary? tell me all!" said Laura, clasping her hands tight in feverish agitation.

"I was near him; I had seen him only a few hours before; and I was the first to hear of the sudden termination to his beautiful life. He was shot down in the streets while saving a little child from the fury of some French soldiers, who were trying to kill her as a Prussian spy; she was the daughter of the people with whom I lodged, and she came flying to me at once with the terrible news, and I hurried to the spot, but too late to see him alive; he was lying under the sunset sky in the arms of death, an image of perfect peace."

"And it was thus his life was flung away!" said Laura, bitterly, "in a foreign country, in the midst of an alien struggle which had no claim on him, and a warfare in which he had no part; and he was driven to that city of death by me! It seems to me, Mary, that I am just as much responsible for his untimely fate as if I had shot him through the heart myself."

"No, Laura, I believe that he was taken in merciful response to his own intense longing for the Lord whom he loved. You were, doubtless, the cause of his leaving his native land, but good was brought out of evil, and if you had seen his smile in death you could never have regretted for a moment that his deep desire was granted, in that early passing of his soul to the bosom of the Father."

"You said he gave you a message for me before he died," said Laura, whose tears were now flowing quietly down her pale cheeks.

"Yes, he charged me with a special mission to you, and I think his prayers brought me here to fulfil it."

"What was it that he wished, Mary," said Lurline, in a low awe-stricken voice; and the answer came in tones of deepest reverence.

"Laura, from the moment that John Pemberton left you at Chiverley, all through the siege, on the ramparts, in the night watches, by the side of the sick and dying, there was continually going up from his faithful heart an earnest prayer for you—the prayer that you might be brought into the love and peace of Christ; he knew that he never should see you on this earth again, and therefore he charged me most solemnly to seek you out and implore of you in his name to turn away from shadows and delusions to the true and only Light, to endeavour with all your heart to find that God to whom he has gone in joy unspeakable and full of glory." Mary rose, and knelt down by Laura as she spoke.

"Dear," she said, "will you listen to the voice of this your faithful friend speaking to you through my lips from the very grave? Will you turn even now to the God and Saviour who is so willing to receive you? Will you ask Him to draw you to Himself; to teach you His love; to show you in His own very being the way, the

truth, the life—the fulness of joy for evermore? I know you feel yourself weak and blind and ignorant; but, Laura, He who reads the thoughts of all humanity knows what you require far better than you do yourself. He will be to you wisdom, and sanctification, and redemption; only fly to Him, cling to Him, cast yourself upon Him, wrestle with Him in the very darkness of your unbelief, tell Him you will not let Him go except He bless you, and He will dawn in your heart the Day-Star of a new existence, He will reveal Himself to you as that Deathless Love, which alone can satisfy your soul!"

Mary had clasped her hands in almost an agony of entreaty, while her voice trembled and her eyes shone through tears of deepest feeling. The effect of her earnestness was almost like the miracle of grace Bertrand had anticipated; for the hardened selfish heart of the worldly woman melted like icebound waters beneath the heavenly sunshine, the springs of its purer impulses were broken open, and, flinging her arms round Mary's neck, Laura exclaimed, in utterances half choked with emotion, "I will! I will! Oh, Mary! I will turn to God with all my heart if only you will help me, teach me, guide me; I will ask Him to Give me faith, and a true sorrow for all my evil life, to show me His will, to grant me His love, to wake me out of my dead indifference and apathy; and I feel, I know John's prayers have not been all in vain, for already I have at least the wish to become a follower of Christ, and so if it be true that the very angels in heaven rejoice over the sinner that repents, I think that he too—my poor lost friend—must be very glad in his home of rest this day."

She broke into hysterical weeping as she ceased to speak, and Mary would not allow her to say another word, but soothed her as if she had been a tired child, till she dropped into tranquil slumber.

(To be Continued.)

THE AGE OF BESETTING SIN.

Its age is not always the same. Sometimes an evil propensity is born with us and develops with the earliest intelligence. Some bring with them into the world an irascible temper which is their cross from infancy to old age. Some exhibit a constitutional inability in matters of appetite, so that if they but wet the shoe in the puddle of intemperance, there is no arrest until they sound the foulest depths of drunkenness.

But oftentimes the besetting sin is of later date, a parasite not born with us but fastened upon us; something foolishly learned, carelessly contracted, something induced by the atmosphere in which we chance to dwell.

"How long is it ago" since this came upon me? How many years have I dragged this weary chain of besetting sin? Thus may each one well question himself.

"Of a child," must be the answer. Aye, and "ofttimes it hath cast me into the fire and into the water to destroy me! How inveterate then is that disorder, and how must it have engrained itself into the very fibres of our being. Surely, this kind goeth not forth but by prayer and fasting.

Or is it otherwise; something not so much sent as chosen; something learned when you had no need to learn it; that became by reason of indulgence and repetition a habit, which a little while ago was not a habit? How does this consideration enhance the misery and add pungency to the self-condemnation.—*Bishop Lay.*