

THE TEACHER'S CROWN.

In one of those dreams which are truer than waking there passed before me a long line of the Sunday-school teachers I have known. One after the other they appeared—those that had taught my childish lips to repeat the Bible words, those that had led my youth into the opening glories of the International Lessons, those that had put to rest the rising doubts of the young man and clinched his faith to the Rock of ages; those, also, of less blessed memory, whom I knew in early or later years, that had done none of these things but other things not so good.

And I noted in astonishment, as each came into view, that all were decked with diverse crowns. I had not looked long before I saw that these crowns were not arbitrary and artificial, but sprung from the very substance of the character of each. They had all received their reward, but according to their deeds.

First came a teacher whom I remembered merely as an eloquent talker. His words were deftly chosen, his sentences smoothly formed. His teaching was a charming harangue, bright with metaphor, flashing with sparkling parables. I loved to listen to him. I was as proud of him as he was of himself. To be sure, the only good thing he ever did for me was to inspire in me the vain desire to become an equally eloquent talker, but yet I was sorry he had not received a nicer crown. It looked very beautiful, as if it were thickly studded with lovely pearls richly iridescent in the sun; but when he came near I saw that each pearl was a little bubble swollen from a reservoir within. These bubbles were bursting all over the crown, fresh ones ever taking their place. It was a very pretty sight, yet a very trivial crown, and I was sorry for him.

There were several worthy teachers in the line whom I remembered as careful instructors in Bible history. They had every date at tongue's end, knew the order of the books and their contents, the relationships of the prominent characters to each other, all details of place and customs. They could repeat Bible verses by the yard, and gave prizes for such feats of unreasoning memory. They were mechanical, but thorough and useful. They had taught me how to dig into the Bible and study it as hard as I would study calculus. I

was grateful to them for this, though they did no more, and so was rather sorry to observe their frail crowns. They were all of paper, neatly folded and plaited, and as I came nearer I saw that each crown was made up of leaves of the Bible.

I saw there also two or three teachers who had always taught with a sad countenance, teaching, not because they loved to teach, but because it was their duty to. "These," I thought, "will be joyful now that their distasteful task is over and their reward has come;" but when I could see their faces clearly they looked mournful as ever. Their crowns were ebon black, pointed with little urns and lined with crape, and they often shifted them, pressing their hands gloomily to their brows, as if the crowns were very ill-fitting and uncomfortable. They wore them with a martyr's air.

There were several teachers whom I remembered with gratitude because they had been so careful, in teaching, to emphasize always the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. These doctrines were the warp and woof of the solid fabric of their lessons. Over and over, in the same set phrases, they pressed those great truths, until, strive as one would, one could never forget them. But they never taught me the relation between these blessed doctrines and my own life. For years the formulas they had taught me remained for me mere words. And so I was not at all surprised to find their symbolic crowns solid and rich, but not attractive, for they were thickly set with jewels in the rough. Here and there, from beneath the incrusting stone, some magnificent gem would flash out, but the beauty and splendor of most of them were hidden.

In my fantastic dream I saw another, who had been a good teacher and a very poor one by turns. His piety and zeal were subject to great fluctuations, and a Sunday's teaching from him, carefully thought out, full of wise helpfulness, would be followed by a fortnight or more of questions read out of a question-book, lifeless and mechanical. I was prepared, therefore, to understand the meaning of his crown, which bore many beautiful gems, but these gems gave intermittent light, flashing out for a moment with most brilliant hues, then suddenly growing dull and dark.

One alone of all I saw in my strange dream