

THE LITTLE FOLK.

The Mother's Psalm.

In the times of the persecution of the Covenanters even the children's lives were in peril. S. R. Crockett, in his book, "The Men of the Moss Hags" (Macmillan), gives this account of the little ones who were saved by the "the mother's psalm":

Now, when the soldiers came near to the huddled cluster of bairns, that same little heart-kroken bleating which I have heard the lambs make broke again from them. It made my heart bleed and the blood tingle in my palms. And this was King Charles Stuart making war! It had not been his father's way. But the soldiers, though some few were smiling a little as at an excellent play, were mostly black ashamed. Nevertheless, they took the bairns and made them kneel, for that was the order, and without mutiny they could not better it.

"Sodger-man, will ye let me tak' my wee brither by the hand and dee that way? I think he would thole it bet'er!" said a little maid of eight looking up. And the soldier let go a great oath and looked at Westerha', as though he could have slain him.

"Bonny wark," he cried, deil burn me gin I listed for this!"

But the little lass had already taken her brother by the hand, "Bend doon, bonny Alec, my man, doon on your knees!" said she,

The boy glanced up at her. He had long, yellow hair. "Will it be sair?" he asked. "Think ye, Maggie? I houp it'll no be awfu' sair!"

"Na, Alec," his sister made answer, "It'll not be either lang or sair."

But the boy of ten, whose name was James Johnstone, neither bent nor knelt. "I hae dune nae wrang. I'll just dee this way," he said: and he stood up like one that straightens himself at drill. The Westerha' bid fire over the bairns' heads, which was cruel, cruel work, and only some of the soldiers did it. But even the few pieces that went off made a great noise in that lonely place. At the sound of the muskets some of the bairns fell forward on their faces, as if they had been really shot, some leapt in the air, but the most part knelt quietly and composedly. The little boy, Alec, whose sister had his hand clasped in hers, made as if he would rise.

"Bide ye doon, Alec," she said, very quietly, "it's no oor turn yet!"

At this the heart within me gave way, and I reared out in my helpless pain a perfect "growl" of anger and grief.

"Bonny Whigs ye air," cried Westerha', "to dee without even a prayer. Put up a prayer this minute for ye shall all dee, every one of you."

And the boy, James Johnstone, made answer to him: "Sir, we cannot pray, for we be too young to pray."

"You are not too young to rebel, nor yet to die for it!" was the brute-beast's answer. Then with that the little girl held up a hand as if she were answering a dominie in a class.

"An' if it please ye sir," she said, "me and Alec can sing 'The Lord's my Shepherd,' Mither taught it us afor she gaed awa'." And before any one could stop her, she stood up like one that leads the singing in a kirk.

Stand up, Alec, my wee mannie," she said.

Then all the bairns stood up. I declare it minded me of Bethlehem and the night when Herod's troopers rode to look for Mary's bonny Bairn. Then from the lips of babes and sucklings arose the quavering strains:

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

As they sang I gripped out my pistols and began to sort and prime them, hardly knowing what I did. For I was resolved to make a break for it, and, at the least, to blow a hole in James Johnson of Westerha' that would mar him for life before I suffered

any more of it. But as they sang I saw trooper after troop r turn away his head, for being Scots' bairns, they had all learned that psalm. The ranks shook. Man after man fell out, and I saw the tears hopping down their cheeks. But it was Douglas of Morton, that stark persecutor, who first broke down.

"Curse it, Westerha'," he cried, "I canna thole this langer. I'll war na mair wi bairns for a' the carldoms i' the North."

And at last even Westerha' turned his bridle rein and rode away from off the bonny holms of Shield hill, for the victory was to the bairns. I wonder what his thoughts were, for he too had learned that psalm, at the knees of his mother. And as the troopers rode loosely up hill and down brae, broken and ashamed, the sound of these bairns' singing followed after them, and souging across the fells came the words:

"Yea, though I walk in Death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill:
For Thou art with me; and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still."

Then Westerha' swore a great oath and put the spurs in his horse to get clear of the sweet singing.

Safe in God's Hands

I want to tell you a true story about a little black boy. He was quite a tiny child, living in a village far away from white men in Africa. One morning, while his mother was getting breakfast ready, there came a number of wicked and cruel men, who rushed into the streets, catching all the people they could to carry them off into slavery. Then they set fire to the village, and hurried away with their poor captives.

Amongst these was the little boy, who had been separated from his mother and was driven along by men who held long whips and beat their prisoners if they did not walk fast enough. How he cried for his mother when the dark night came on and he was all alone with his cruel masters!

At last, after many weeks, the march was over, and the little boy with many others was sold as a slave, and put on board a ship to go over the sea.

Very bitterly he lamented his sad fate, and felt that everything was against him now. But God had not forgotten him, and was not going to forsake the little black boy, but would one day make him a great blessing to his native land. Soon after they had started from the shore an English captain caught sight of the poor slaves, and hurried across the waves to rescue them. The little black boy, with the others, was carried safely to a town where he was taught to read his Bible, and there he learnt about Jesus and His great love.

Many years after that he became a preacher of the the Gospel, and is now honoured and useful Samuel Crowther, the Bishop of the Niger. Though he had been carried away from his parents, and was in the hands of such wicked men, the Lord had not forsaken or forgotten him.

Neither will He ever forget you and me. Others may forget us, and some who love us very much may be so far away from us that they cannot help us if they would. But Jesus is always near, never goes away, and is ready every moment to take our hand when we reach it out to Him in faith for help. Let us always remember that we have no friend like Jesus, and the promise is that the Holy Spirit shall bring all the good things He uttered to our remembrance.

And then the Lord Jesus never dies. Sometimes we go into the leafy churchyard and see the white stones which tell us that some mother or father or teacher has been laid to rest. But "He ever liveth," our Saviour never says good-bye to us; when death comes it has no power over Him, and He is with us "always even unto the end of the world."

The love of Jesus does not change. He is not like some who are very kind to us to-day, but cool and forgetful to-morrow. He, in His love to us and His care over us, is the same "yesterday, to-day and for ever."