

NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE.

Nearer, my God, to thee
Nearer to thee,
Even though it be a cross
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

Though, like the wanderer,
Daylight all gone,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone;
Yet, in my dream, I'd be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

There let the way appear
Steps up to heaven;
All that thou sendest me
In mercy given,
Angels to beckon me
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

Then, with my waking thoughts
Bright with thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs
Bethel I'll raise,
So by my woes to be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

And when on joyful wing
Cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon, and stars forgot,
Upward I fly,
Still all my song shall be
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee.

LITTLE SILENCE.

The Story of a Mute Witness.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

One morning when Byrd Nolan, a detective, came down to breakfast, he was made aware of the fact that another crime had been committed.

When the detective took his seat at the table, one of the boarders tossed the paper to him saying

"There's more work for you. But this time, from the surroundings, you detectives will have your hands full, for the murderer left no clew, and already the police are at fault."

Nolan had returned on the late train and knew nothing of the tragedy, therefore he took the paper with a good deal of curiosity. He found the paragraph, and while waiting for his coffee, read that a Mrs. Peters, a sewing-woman, had been killed, while she was alone, her only child, a mute boy, having gone to bed some time before.

The detective knew nothing about the Peters family. He read that the murdered woman was a widow, economical and industrious, making a living for herself and child with her needle, and he could not see why she should be singled out for assassination.

He paid no heed to the theories advanced by the boarders for the purpose of drawing him into a net, but discussed his breakfast and left the table.

He had nothing to do, the trial which had taken him from the city had been finished, and he was at liberty to take up the one that now presented itself.

Nolan always had a heart for the wrongs of the poorer classes. He had felt the stings of poverty when a boy, and when he read of the murder of the sewing-woman, he secretly resolved to hunt the murderer down and avenge the dastardly crime.

When he reached the house, he found it in charge of the police and was told that for once they were balked—that the murderer had killed and vanished. He had not left behind a single clew, and his motive was totally unknown.

"Where's the boy?" asked Nolan.

Little Harvey Peters, a bright-looking boy of ten, was brought into the room, but of course he could tell nothing. He had not been educated in the sign language of mutes and knew nothing of communication. It was repeated that the boy was asleep when the blow was struck, for the persons who discovered the crime found him on his couch in that condition.

The day after the funeral, the commissioner of Public Charities took possession of Harvey Peters,

and Nolan learned that he was to have a home beneath a public roof.

He went home and wrestled with the dark problem of blood and death. The sewing-woman had been killed with a dagger, which, finding her heart, produced instant death; the house had not been plundered so far as he could see, and the slight struggle which had taken place between the victim and her enemy had given him no clew.

"The boy must talk," said the detective. "It all lies with him. He must tell what happened that night, and we must know whether he was asleep when the murderer came, or whether he did not see something." That afternoon he presented himself at the office of the Commissioner of Charities.

"I want Harvey Peters," said he. "I will take care of him. He shall be reared by my sister, who used to teach in a deaf and dumb school, and he shall lack for none of the comforts of life."

After some discussion the boy was handed over to Nolan, and that day he found a new home beneath a roof which did not belong to the great city.

Mary Nolan was kind and winning; she loved children, and when her brother came in leading the little mute, her heart went out to him and she took him in her arms.

"I will do my part," she said to her brother. "This boy shall learn how to talk to us. It will take time." "I will wait, if it takes years." "But after all he may tell us nothing."

"We must take that risk, Mary. This crime is absolutely clewless. I never saw anything like it. Take care of Little Silence and teach him the mute's alphabet."

From that day Harvey Peters was "Little Silence" to the detective and his sister. They called him nothing else, and Nolan watched with interest the slight progress the boy made at the beginning.

"So you've taken the widow's son to your sister's," said a druggist to Nolan one night.

The little pharmacy was situated near the scene of the crime, and Nolan was in the habit of dropping in at night and talking with the junior partner on his way home.

"Yes; I took him out of the House of Charities, and Mary is going to look after him."

"Do you think he can learn the mute's language?"

"I don't know. Some children are very apt, others very dull. Time will tell in this case."

"The boy was asleep, you know," continued the druggist. "He saw nothing of the crime, and therefore all your labor on him may be for naught. A good deal of time lost, eh, Nolan?"

"Not lost, not at all. We will adopt the boy, and he will be a comfort to Mary and I, repaying us ten times over for our teaching."

Weeks passed. Nolan, with all his acumen seemed entirely lost in the mazes of that mysterious murder. He could not pick up a single clew, and when the other detectives left the case and chaffed him for clinging to it, he merely shook his head and thought of Little Silence.

One night, six months after the crime, he discovered a man watching the house where his sister lived. The detective saw the dark figure half hidden by trees, and when it moved off, he followed it and tracked it to a plain-looking house in another part of the city.

"That was Dothen, the druggist. This is an odd way he has of courting my sister Mary," said the detective. "I wonder what led him to watch the house?"

Within the last three months the young druggist had managed to become acquainted with Mary Nolan,

and his attentions had become so marked that he was looked upon as the sister's lover. Dothen was a man of property, had a good business, and, on the whole, was considered a good catch by several ambitious mamma's. But Nolan did not like him. He could discover nothing about his past beyond Dothen's own story that he had come from the West, where he was respectably connected.

To see him watching his sister's house at an unseasonable hour aroused Nolan's suspicions, and when a day or two after, Little Silence fell sick after a visit to the house by the druggist, who had watched with interest a lesson given the boy by Mary Nolan, the detective told his sister about the secret vigil in front of the building.

"He was not here that night," said Mary. "Mr. Dothen was not here on that date, and why he should watch the house is beyond my comprehension."

Little Silence grew worse. Dothen called and left not only his sympathy, but some medicines, as he had been a doctor, and Mary administered it to the mute.

Day by day Little Silence faded like a flower before the frost of fall. He seemed to have been smitten with a strange disease, which was taking him off, and before the little white hands, which were almost bloodless, could tell in sign-language the secret of the murder.

Mary Nolan bent over the mute with a sympathetic heart and smoothed his fevered brow, receiving from him a look of thanks which would have melted a heart of stone.

"Shall I continue the lessons? He is learning to form words with his fingers," said the detective's sister one day. "The effort weakens him, but he seems eager to learn."

"By all means go on," was the answer. "When he is gone all will be dark, and the crime of Cherry Street is our only hope."

Nearly all of the detective's spare time was spent at the home of his sister.

Every now and then, however, he would drop into the drug store and talk with Dothen. The druggist took a great interest in the dying mute, and would ask after him whenever Nolan called.

"Do you know that the boy will never learn the making of words?" said the detective one afternoon. "He seems to have lost his powers to pick up anything and keep it very long. Mary is going to get him to spell out words, but I fear he will die without learning how to do it."

"Why, what did you expect to get from the boy?" queried Dothen.

"Not much, after all," was the reply. "We thought perhaps he saw something that night—that he might not have been asleep, you know."

"But that is largely guess-work with you, Nolan?"

"Yes. If the boy dies without telling anything, you will be frustrated."

"Of course." That night Nolan sent for the druggist, and in half an hour the figure of Dothen crossed the doorway of the sister's home.

Perhaps he wondered why he had been summoned to the house, but when Mary Nolan approached him and whispered that Little Silence was dying, the question was answered, and he stole on tip toe to the mute's chamber.

In a darkened room, propped up by pillows, sat a boy, reduced by his mysterious disease to a mere shadow. But his eyes were as bright as stars, and his hands nearly transparent, seemed endowed with unworldly motion.

He did not see Dothen, who went

to the head of the couch and half hid himself from the boy's look.

Mary Nolan bent over the boy and was trying to hold his gaze.

"Ask him now," said the detective. "It is now or never, Mary."

Swiftly flew the sister's fingers and the dying mute fixed his eyes upon them.

He had spelled some thing for Mary, but slowly, and this had encouraged her.

"Harvey, dear, what did you see the night your mother died?" asked Mary Nolan.

The hands of the boy were lifted and his fingers began to move.

Slowly they met and parted as they formed the silent letters of the strange alphabet, and Nolan, who knew something about them, leaned forward and watched the fingers with all his eyes.

"Go slow, Harvey," said Mary. "Think before you talk. What did you see that night?"

"I saw a man come into the room where we sat," said the moving hands. "I saw him when he opened the door, but mamma did not. He almost frightened me from the room, for he wore a black mask and I could not see much of his face. When mamma looked up he came forward and she was caught before she could meet him. There was a struggle in the room and I ran away. When I came back mamma was lying on the floor, so still? I hardly know what happened after that, only I fell to the floor and cried. I must have gone to bed crying, for they found me there the next morning."

It cost the boy a great effort to tell this much.

Mary Nolan and her brother looked at one another.

"Ask him if he saw anything peculiar about that man," said the father. "Quick, Mary, for the child is dying."

Mary put the questions, and then sprung forward and lifted the sinking boy.

"I saw his forehead above the mask. There was a livid scar over one of the eyes."

Mary Nolan uttered a sharp cry and fell back.

"Why, where is Mr. Dothen?" she exclaimed. The druggist was gone; he had stolen from the house as noiselessly as a spectre, and neither brother nor sister had been the wiser for his going.

"Look to the boy!" said Nolan clutching Mary's arm. "The poor boy has given me the clew. He has spoken with death at his heart."

Out of the house rushed the detective. He crossed over the city and rapped at a certain door on the other side.

When it was unlocked, he went up a flight of steps two at a time and burst without ceremony into a room where there was a light. Dothen white-faced and statue-like faced him with the look of a tiger.

"I thought you would come," said he, through clinched teeth. "I am the man. I killed Mrs. Peters because she knew me in the West and knew that I was once in the penitentiary for horse-stealing. The only way to silence her was to kill her. You persevered with the boy until you made him talk. Look I am the man with the scar, and throwing back his hair, Dothen revealed the scar seen by Little Silence the night of the murder."

When Nolan, with the look of a victor, left the house that night he was not alone. Dothen went out with him, and the next day the whole city recalled the death of the sewing-woman of Cherry Street when it read of the arrest of the druggist and the death of the mute, who had breathed his last in Mary Nolan's arms.—*The Banner Weekly.*