

THE DAYS OF WESLEY.

IX.

THANK God we are at home again, which a month since I scarcely expected to be.

At Hackney, on Friday morning, March the 8th, I was startled out of my sleep in the early dusk before dawn by a heaving and a jarring, which made me think, in the confusion of waking, that I was at sea again with father and Hugh, and that the ship had struck against a rock, and was grating over it.

I sprang up instantly, with a vague fear of drowning; but I shall never forget the horror of utter helplessness which followed, when I perceived that it was Aunt Henderson's great crimson-damask four-post bed which was thus tottering—that it was the gigantic polished oak wardrobe whose doors were flying open, and the familiar white jug and basin which were rattling in that unaccountable way against each other.

It flashed on me at once that it was the earth that was moving—the solid earth itself heaving like the sea!

My first impulse was to throw myself on my knees by the bedside. Then I committed myself to God, and felt there was something yet that "could not be moved."

Then followed another shock and jarring motion. The fire-irons rattled, the water-jug fell and was broken, the wardrobe tottered and strained. And there seemed something more awful in the unwonted noises among these familiar things than there would have been in the roar of a cannonade or any other strange sound.

But besides these noises, and through and behind, and underneath them, came a low distant rumble like thunder, which yet was not thunder; not above but beneath, for it seemed quivering through the earth.

I sprang to my feet, and wrapping myself in my great cloak, rushed out to mother's room.

The frightened servants were already gathered on the landing, crying that the end of the world was come, and wringing their hands and wondering what would become of mistress, who has gone to the early prayers at the Foundery.

All had rushed together with the instinct of frightened cattle. No one had thought of striking a light.

I crept to mother's bedside, and kneeling down pressed her hand in both mine.

"My darling," she said, "I am so thankful we are together. If only Jack were here. Kitty! If only I could feel he was safe, whatever happened! Kitty, let us be still, and pray for Jack."

For mother thought, like most of us, that the end of the world was come.

Another shock, and jar, and rumble of that awful underground thunder;

and then a fearful crash above us, and a piercing shriek from all outside, with sobs, and cries of "Lord have mercy on me." Another crash, and another burst of shrieks and sobs.

And mother said nothing, but solemnly clasped her hands in prayer.

Then there came a stillness and a hush in the voices outside, and through the silence we heard the wind rustling in the tall elm tree close to the window, and saw that the dusk was slowly creeping into dawn.

And mother said solemnly,

"It was to be in the morning, Kitty! At least I always thought so. And, O child, it must be less terrible than death! If only I were sure about Jack! What are lightnings and thunders, and the rolling together of Heaven and earth as a scroll, compared with the severing of soul and body, of husband and wife, of mother and child! And then," she said, as if that hope absorbed all terror, and all other hopes, "His appearing! His glorious appearing! It is to come one day, and suddenly, we are told. Who can say when it may not come?"

It was very strange, the awful apprehension which terrified so many that night out of all their dreams of security, seemed to give mother a calm and an assurance I never heard her express before.

If at other times the question had been asked her, "Lovest thou me?" she would have answered, "I hope so. I fear it is very little; but I only trust it may be called love."

But now that she thought he might be indeed at hand, all thought of her short-comings seemed absorbed in the thought of him. She never thought of her love. She loved, and looked for him.

I remember it all so distinctly, because, after that little prayer by my own bedside, I cannot think why, but my terror seemed to vanish, and almost my awe. I felt almost ashamed of myself as if it were an irreverence, that I could not feel the apprehension others did. But after all, though the house trembled, it did seem to stand quite firm. And when that great crash came, I could not help thinking it was like a chimney falling; for afterwards I heard the stones and mortar rolling down; and when no harm followed, I thought, "Now, all that is likely to fall has come down, and the danger is over."

I feel quite angry with myself for being so insensible, but I could not help it. I suppose it was because I have so little imagination.

In a few minutes I heard father's voice rising in a tone of quiet command above the sobs of the maids, desiring one of them to bring him a tinder box. Then the house door was unbarred, and very soon father re-entered the room with a light, and said,—*"It is an earthquake, but not very violent. I have felt far severer shocks when I was on service in the West Indies. The crash was the*

chimney falling through the roof of the old part of the house. The danger is over for the present, but it may recur, and we should be prepared."

Not long after, Aunt Henderson came back in her sedan-chair from the Foundery. She told us that they were all assembled in the large preaching-house, when the walls were shaken so violently that they all expected the building to fall on their heads. A great cry followed, and shrieks of agonized terror. But Mr. Charles Wesley's voice immediately rose calmly above the tumult, saying,—*"Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved, and the hills be carried into the midst of the sea; for the Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."* Evelyn was there, Aunt Henderson said, and observed to her that "it would be worth while to have an earthquake a week, to see the hearts of the people shaken as they were then." "Evelyn is a strange girl, but there is more in her than I thought," she concluded.

And I thought how strangely we shall all be revealed to each other, when the day really comes which will strip off all disguises, and take the blinding beams out of all eyes!

The danger was not over. One messenger after another continued to arrive with accounts of the tottering walls and falling chimneys they had seen, and with wild incoherent rumours of the ruin and destruction of which they had heard.

At eight o'clock, Aunt Beauchamp's coach drove up to the door, and she herself crept out of it with Evelyn, her grey hair streaming in dishevelled locks under her hood, her face wan and haggard with terror and the absence of rouge.

"My dearest sister," she exclaimed, throwing herself hysterically into Aunt Henderson's arms, "the chimney-stacks were crashing through the roofs in Great Ormond Street, the tiles raining like hail on the pavements, the people shrieking and crying, the streets full of flying coaches and men on horseback. I wanted to have escaped from the city at once, but Sir John said it was impossible for a day or two, so I have taken refuge with you for the night."

Poor Aunt Beauchamp was very tender and subdued. She was ready to listen to any amount of sermons,—provided she were in a safe place,—from Aunt Henderson, even when they descended to such details as hair powder and rouge-pots, although she decidedly objected to accompanying her to Mr. Wesley's five o'clock early morning service at the Foundery.

"My dear Sister Henderson," she sobbed, "you, and Kitty, and Evelyn, and every one, have become so good! and I am a poor, foolish, worldly old woman. I am sure I do feel I want some kind of religion that would make me not afraid to meet whatever might happen. If you really think it would make me safe, I would attend that

Chapel at the Foundery, or Mr. Whitefield's Tabernacle, or anything. But I cannot go back among the tottering houses now. It is too much to expect. If you could only find any one to preach in the open air, we might go in our chairs, and there would be no danger."

"My dear Sister Beauchamp," replied Aunt Henderson, grimly, "we cannot go in our chairs to Heaven."

"What do you mean, sister?" was the reply; "the Methodists do not recommend pilgrimages, do they? I am sure I have often wished we Protestants had something of that kind. Lady Fanny Talbot comes back from her retreat in Lent looking so relieved and comfortable, feeling she has arranged everything for the year. But the worst of the Methodists is, they seem never to have done."

Aunt Henderson's horror at this suggestion was so great, she seemed to have lost the power of reply.

And then mother said very quietly:

"Dear Sister Beauchamp, the Bible and good men say religion is not only a shield against destruction, it is a staff in all the troubles of life, and a cordial which we never want to have done with. For, if religion does anything for us, I think it leads us to God, and this is our joy and our rest."

Tears gathered in Aunt Beauchamp's eyes, not hysterical tears; and she looked at mother with something like one of Cousin Evelyn's wistful, earnest looks, and said very softly:

"I am afraid I do not know much of that, sister; I wish I did."

On the following night Aunt Beauchamp insisted on whirling father, and mother, and me away to Bath in her coach.

She would not wait an hour after Sir John was ready, and we started at midnight. Link boys ran beside us through the dark and silent streets. The city seemed deserted. We met no noisy rollicking parties. Only in two places did we encounter a crowd. One of these places was Moorfields, where a crowd of men, women, and children had collected, weeping and lamenting, with no one to comfort them; and the other was Hyde Park, where Mr. Whitefield was preaching to a multitude who had gathered around him in their terror, as little children round a mother's knee.

It was a strange scene, as we drove slowly on the outskirts of the crowd. Here and there the uncertain flare of torches revealed a group of awe-stricken faces, many of them wet with silent weeping; while the dense throngs beyond were only manifest from that peculiar audible hush which broods over a listening multitude, broken here and there by an irrepressible sob or wail, or by agonized cries, such as: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!" "What shall I do to be saved?"

We scarcely spoke to each other all that night, and it was very strange when the dawn crept up the sky to see