



The Family Circle.

NUMBERED WITH THY SAINTS.

There is a little town in a distant state, set on a wooded hill in the midst of gently undulating country.

Dear little Dulwich! One by one your wandering sons and daughters come back to you for refuge and peace. In dying their eyes turn to that quiet spot where, in your very heart, your dead rests. "Take me back," they say, "and lay me there in the solemn shade. Young voices will sometimes sound above me, and kind eyes will watch my resting-place in loving remembrance."

With words like these echoing in her heart, Agatha walked up and down the veranda with her little brother. It was the evening of a rainy Good Friday. From time to time the two stopped. The girl, pressing the child's cheek to her side with one hand, gazed sadly through the mist toward a tall, white stone in the distance, which marked the grave of her father.

Three long months had passed since his death, and as common duties grew important, Agatha felt more keenly the meaning of her loss. They stood there, the young girl and the child, with the dull red glow of the sunset behind them, their faces turned toward the dead.

"A picture for the day!" thought the gentleman who came up the broad gravel-walk toward the house.

"How long you have been gone, Uncle Stephen!" cried the boy.

"Mr. Carson stopped me at the church, Harry," said his uncle. "Agatha, he will be here soon to see you about the Easter music."

"It is too late to change the programme," replied Agatha. "I thought it had all been arranged three weeks ago."

"Miss Burr had a sore throat, and they want you to take her place."

Agatha gave a slight exclamation of dismay.

"Anything but to sing!" she said. "Remember that last night—I sang to him—to the end."

"I know," said her uncle.

"And then Easter comes this year on his birthday and mine. O Uncle Stephen, he was so young! Only forty, and he had such noble, unselfish plans! So much begun that no one else could finish! And now it is all over!"

"Over!" said her uncle. "I trust not."

"I know what you mean," she said, with a sigh, "but what is another world to me when I want him here? Then, too, it would comfort me, I suppose, if I had faith enough. I am afraid I do not really believe."

"My dear girl," said her uncle, gravely, "there are many things that our Heavenly Father has not given us the power to understand; but we can trust him. He knows best."

"I try to trust," said Agatha, "but papa has been so much to us since mamma went, and Harry and I, we are so lonely! Then, how can I be sure! I may never see him again." Her voice quivered with pain as she added, "It is all so dark!"

"Trust him," said her uncle. "His wisdom and goodness are infinite, infinite; we can in no way limit them. Trust, some day, how or where or when we may not know, but some day, all will be well with us. We may be sure of that."

"But, Uncle Stephen, can you conceive of happiness without Aunt Mildred and the children? You have lost them all. What do you live for but the hope of meeting them again?"

"I hope for it," said her uncle. "That is my only conception of happiness, but my conception may be all wrong. Of only one thing I am sure, and that is that my Heavenly Father knows and will do what is best for us all."

"I do not think I really disbelieve," said Agatha, "it is rather that I do not understand. I grope for the truth. I cannot see." The note of agony crept into her voice again.

Her uncle was looking over the tops of

the trees beyond the western valley into the slowly darkening evening sky.

"When will people learn," he said, sorrowfully, "that they do not need to see?"

"People don't see," said little Harry, who had been listening all this time with a puzzled look of half comprehension. "You can't see them at all. But they will rise again, with a great rush of wings."

Agatha's uncle looked at her questioningly.

"He has been talking to Minna in the kitchen about Easter among the Moravians," she said. "His head seems full of strange notions lately."

Just then the sound of a firm step on the gravel near at hand caused them all to turn.

"It's Mr. Casson," said Agatha.

Her uncle went to meet the rector, and silently gave him his hand.

"You will sing for us, Agatha, on Sunday?" he said, coming toward her.

She did not answer for a moment, and then said, with an effort at self-control:

"I cannot, I cannot. You know how many associations the day has for me."

"Yes," said the clergyman, "I remember that you were born on his twenty-third birthday, and that Sunday is its anniversary. He was very proud of his little girl."

She bent her head, unable to speak.

"I should like to think of you," Mr. Casson continued, "as singing a song of triumph for him on this Easter Day, when the whole angelic host rejoice with their risen Lord."

Agatha was crying.

"He is not dead," he added, softly.

"He is dead for me!" sobbed the girl.

"I cannot feel the other life. I cannot know it. For me he is lying over there by mamma, in the mist and the cold. O my dearest, my dearest!"

"Try not to think of it so," urged the rector. "It may be given him to watch over those he loves. What joy your singing might give him! He made a glorious fight for all that is highest, Agatha. Can you not celebrate his first triumphal day in heaven?"

"I would, Mr. Casson," Agatha answered, earnestly, "but it is impossible. I have tried—you know I have," turning to her uncle. "But at the first note, everything sweeps over me in a great wave of sorrow."

"Well, good-by," said the rector.

"You may feel differently by Sunday." And he hurried away.

While they had been talking, Agatha was too much moved to notice the convulsive pressure of the little hand in her own, or the pleading expression of a pair of anxious eyes uplifted to her downcast face.

"You should have had your hat on, dear," she said, laying her hand on her brother's curly head. But the little fellow was too intent on his own thoughts to heed her words.

"You must sing Easter, Agatha," he said. "Say you will, dear! He will miss it so, if you don't! Just in the morning, Agatha, for papa!"

"Sweetheart, I do not think I can," answered Agatha, gently.

The child buried his face in the black folds of her dress, and began to cry softly.

"It will all be spoiled," he murmured.

"Tell me about it," said his uncle, drawing Harry into the house, and taking him on his knee.

"I was 'companying Minna in the kitchen," said the child, between his sobs, "when she told me about it. And now if Agatha won't sing I shall not have anybody, and Minna said the Moravian people had a great band with bright horns—and I meant to have only Agatha."

"Come," said his uncle, "stop crying, and tell me slowly what all this is about."

"It was about how they did at Easter when Minna was little. They went early in the morning, and marched up a high hill, the men first and the women last, to the place where—they were buried."

"Where who were buried, dear?"

"Their people that they loved,—like papa," said Harry, whispering. "Then they played on their bright horns, and all sang an Easter hymn, a great, mighty hymn, just as the sun rose. And when I asked Minna why they did it, she said it was because on Easter the ones who had died that year would rise, with a rushing sound of wings, and the people sang on account of being glad."

"I asked her why we didn't bury papa

in that country, but Minna said it made no difference; that papa would go to heaven sooner than any one else she ever knew. So, all alone I knew I couldn't sing a great, mighty hymn,—Minna says 'great mighty'—but Agatha could; her voice is like a big angel's."

"Never mind," said his uncle, stroking his head, "perhaps poor Agatha would like to sing, but cannot. Sing your hymn yourself; that will do."

A little comforted, the child let his sister lead him upstairs. Her thoughts were far away, as she slowly helped him to undress.

"Can I really go and sing it myself, Agatha?" he asked, as he wriggled into his nightgown.

"Yes, dear," she answered, absently.

The little face, emerging from the white folds, wore an astonished expression. Harry looked at her keenly, but, finding the permission not withdrawn, he discreetly left the matter as it was.

In the afternoon of the following day Harry and Minna went out into the warm April air for a walk. Minna was devoted to Harry. She treated him as an equal in age and experience.

"He's that sensible!" she would admiringly affirm; "you couldn't no more treat him like a baby than you could Mr. Casson. He's more sense than ten of some men."

"We've got to be home in time to get tea," she said, when the sun warned them that it was nearing five o'clock.

"Did you see that big bunch of Easter lilies, Minna? Mr. Casson brought it to Agatha from Littleton. Agatha cried. Do you suppose it was anything about papa?"

"Course it was," said Minna. "The lilies were meant for your papa; and Harry," she added, "you musn't forget to say, 'The Lord is risen,' in the morning, and if anybody says it to you, you must answer, 'he is risen indeed,' like your papa taught you."

"I couldn't forget that," said Harry. "I shall say it to Agatha. Do you suppose she'll go with me and sing the great, mighty hymn?" he asked, wistfully.

"Oh, you just let her alone," said Minna. "She's been bothered enough about singing all day."

"Very well," he said with a tremble in his voice. "I shall have to do it all alone."

Agatha, absorbed and preoccupied with her own affairs, was wholly unconscious of Harry's little plan. Dull despair and weary lack of faith possessed her heart; they stood like a wall, between her and all she loved best.

When Harry's bedtime arrived, Agatha undressed him mechanically, and answered his chatter at random. The tall spray of lilies stood in a large vase near the window.

"I know who they are for," said the boy, sinking his voice mysteriously. "May I put them there, Agatha, dear, so that he may know that we have remembered? And won't you come? We cannot see him, you know, but he may see us, and he would miss you so. You are sure you cannot sing?"

Agatha shook her head too heart-sick to answer.

"Then may I? You know you did promise."

"Yes, dear."

"They go upward, with a great rush of wings. We only hear it," he continued, dreamily looking out of the window, his cheeks red and his eyes glistening. "And you must not forget, when I say, 'The Lord is risen,' to answer, 'He is risen indeed.' Papa liked to have us do that. You'll remember?"

"Yes, dear," she replied again.

"Agatha!" he called, when, after tucking him snugly into his cot, she had half-closed the chamber door.

"Yes, Harry?" she answered, waiting outside.

"What time does the sun rise?"

"About five o'clock, dear, I think."

"And you are sure you can't sing the great, mighty hymn?"

"Yes, I am sure; and don't wake poor Agatha at five o'clock; she is tired."

"Then can I do it alone, if I won't disturb anybody?" he insisted.

"Oh, yes, if you'll be quiet!" she called, with a shade of impatience in her voice.

"And now go to sleep."

She went slowly down-stairs. The child listened for the last rustle of her dress, and then, when all was silent, he hid his head in the pillow, and cried.

"She doesn't care," he sobbed, piteously, "and—he—will—be—so—disappointed."

"Poor boy! No one had taken any pains to understand him. When Agatha came up to the room an hour or two later, the tears were still wet on his cheek.

Early the next morning Agatha was awakened by the sudden sound of the closing of a door. For a few moments she gazed idly about the room at the furniture, in the half-light which fell through the window, wondering sleepily what was the cause of the noise. Like a thrust from a knife-blade, there returned upon her the heart-sick recollection of those dawns through whose gray shadows she had watched in hopeless agony, only a short time ago.

With a stifled moan, she put out her hand towards Harry's cot, but the little, warm head of thick, light hair that she expected to feel was gone. Startled, she raised herself in bed; the bells of the steeple were ringing five o'clock, and Harry was not there!

His clothes hung on their chair, but a pair of thick woollen shoes and a heavy, white shawl were missing. The lilies, too, were not in their vase.

Agatha dimly remembered her permission so heedlessly given. Hurrying to the window, she could make out, in the distance, a small, white form threading its way among the graves in the church-yard. She threw on her clothes with frantic haste, and ran after her brother across the wet grass.

The eastern sky was already beginning to glow when she reached the foot of the low hill where her father was buried. A little, kneeling figure stood out against the reddening background. The shawl had dropped from the boy's shoulders, and the long branch of lilies towered above the reverently bent head. He was praying while he watched.

Agatha ascended to his side. Something in the time and place, and in the rapt inspiration of the uplifted eyes, silenced all frightened remonstrances. Folding him in the warm shawl, she knelt at his side.

Tranquil and hushed the broad valley lay before her in the shadows of the blue hills; a few light clouds hung above them, and the morning sky was shot with gold and crimson.

The spirit of the day fell upon Agatha, and the child's faith, beautiful and strange, flooded her heart with unwonted light. As she knelt there, waiting for her beloved to pass in triumph, a lofty pride possessed her soul; she felt her kinship with one of that radiant host whose souls seemed to be floating upward with the resplendent eastern clouds.

Slowly the red disk of the sun began to appear, and, moved by a common impulse, Agatha and Harry rose to their feet.

"Quick, before he is gone!" whispered Harry, laying the flowers gently along the grave, and beginning to sing:

"Christ the Lord is risen to-day,
Sons of men and angels say."

But suddenly all the air was filled with melody, and the sweet child's treble was drowned in Agatha's wonderful voice:

"Raise your joys and triumphs high,
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply."

Out over the still fields rang the glorious old hymn and all the crimson clouds melted away as the great golden sun swung majestically from the hill-tops into the clear sky.

"Lo! our Sun's eclipse is o'er,
Lo! He sets in blood no more!"

A gust of wind came up from the valley, and rustled among the dry leaves overhead. To Harry it was the rush of those mighty wings so fearfully longed for. Startled, he seized his sister's hand, and the song died away upon his trembling lips; but Agatha's voice soared on unshaken:

"Death in vain forbids His rise,
Christ has opened Paradise!"

When the last verse was sung, the day shone everywhere around them, and the birds were softly twittering in the bushes. A shaft of sunlight illumined the white flowers on the grave at their feet, and to Agatha the world was once more beautiful.

They stood for a moment in silence, and then she drew the little boy toward home.

"The Lord is risen," he said, solemnly. And from the bottom of Agatha's full heart the answer came:

"He is risen, indeed!"

—Mary Tappan Wright, in *Youth's Companion*.