

THANKSGIVING



By Clinton Scollard

Thanksgiving for God's boundless blue
Above us brooding; for the hue
And perfumed pageant of the year;
For waters singing lyric clear,
And birds in choral retinue.

For all the varied life we view
About us bourgeoning; for the clue
To happiness beyond the Here—
Thanksgiving!

For chance the kindly deed to do
While dawn and dusk their paths pursue;
For hope and its attendant cheer;
For all that's noble and sincere;
For friends—but chiefly, love, for you—
Thanksgiving!

—Tribune Sunday Magazine.

How The Comforter Came.

(Mrs. Elizabeth Cheney, in the 'Christian Advocate.')

My sister Katherine's wedding day shines out from the dim past of our pleasant but commonplace family annals something as a tall, snowy spray from a garden gleam in a field of clover blooms. I was a school girl then, with a faculty for idealizing people and things that charmed me, and although the wedding was a quiet one at home in the afternoon it was to me a wonderful event, and permeated my whole being with strange delight. I do not think, however, that my imagination endowed Katherine with any fictitious loveliness. One never grew quite accustomed to her beauty. For that matter, who has ever become used to sunrises or Summer fields or the woods in October—who that has his soul's eyes once unveiled? Katherine was a June bride, and pink and white roses hung in great unstinted, delicate masses upon the vines that clambered on the wide porch and up to the eaves of our old home. I recall, after all the years, the enchanting stir all through the old-fashioned house. The faint, delicious odors, the glint of grandmother's cherished silver, the flashes of color, the ripple of music and laughter—all these mingle in memory when I think of that day, and sunshine everywhere, flickering between the elms in the front yard, glancing through the window draperies, dancing irreverently on great-grandfather's dim, formidable portrait, and lovingly touching our Katherine's golden hair as she stood beside her husband to receive the good wishes of her friends. We pelted them with roses as they went down the sunny path to their carriage, the tall, broad-shouldered, noble-looking man, and Katherine, radiant in her gray gown, turning to throw kisses at father and mother. It was so beautiful that I rebelled and wondered a little later when I found mother sobbing quietly in the china closet.

The next time that I saw Katherine she was coming up that same path on a November morning in the following year. It was a gray, desolate day, and the wind rattled the long bare branches of the elms against the house, swinging the forsaken nests of orioles

to and fro, and shaking the leafless, brown vines as if to tear them from column and wall. Father had paused at the curbstone to pay the hack driver, and Katherine, her white, mournful face showing like marble against her black raiment, walked slowly toward the house, holding in her arms the dearest little baby in the world. Mother stood in the open door and put her arms around them both.

'You're as welcome as the day you were born!' she said, with a sob, to Katherine.

My sister tenderly handed me the baby, and sank into a big chair in front of the fire. Tears rolled over her cheeks.

'Oh, mother! Oh, Florence!' she said. 'To think that Leonard is dead! I cannot have it so!'

I had eagerly removed the baby's hood and cloak, and while mother hovered over Katherine I held our new treasure close; but the little one stretched out his dimpled hands to his mother with a gleeful cry, and Katherine smiled through her tears as she received her darling back again.

'He has his father's eyes,' she said. 'He will be mamma's comfort for years and years.'

But there were never any such years. After a few months our precious baby went to his father. This was a long time ago, but I can never forget how Katherine, who we thought must die too, when she was told that her boy could not live, lay for two days and nights without food or drink, without a word to any of us—how she arose from her bed with such joy in her eyes, such a light on her face, that we almost feared for her reason. For ten days she shared the care of her child, never faltering nor murmuring, but sometimes weeping strangely blessed tears that did not seem to spring from agony, but from depths of tenderness. She said but little as those long days of watching passed by. On the night when the little spirit slipped away Katherine held the baby on her lap as the last breath fluttered on its lips.

'O Thou dear Shepherd,' she whispered, 'I lay my lamb in Thy bosom.'

I stood by in a passion of tears. Even father wept aloud, and mother's face was white and drawn with a yet deeper anguish that could not cry out. I resented the serenity with which Katherine kissed the dear, tiny hands. Before going to my room I managed to whisper to mother:

'I don't know what to make of sister. She does not seem to suffer as we do.'

'Florence,' replied mother, 'the Comforter has come to your sister.'

But I could not understand.

I thought of her empty arms, of her bitter disappointments, and still wondered. She lived on among us for ten years. She was the light of the house. She was joyful, but with a sacred gladness that never ran shallow enough for jollity. She was cheerful always, but especially on dull days, and when household affairs went wrong. She was an incarnation of the apostolic benediction. Our village took her into its heart of hearts. She became a sort of patron saint. People came to her with their troubles, and ran to share their joys with her. When she died the school children wept, and the factory girls, and the old folks at the town farm. Senator Loring's widow, from the hill, and the little lame black boy who swept the steps of father's office stood at our door at the same time with flowers.

Katherine knew that she was going, and it seemed as if the reflection of a brightness unseen by us made her exquisite face glow like an angel's.

'I thought,' she whispered, 'that I could not live without Leonard and the baby, but the Comforter came, and the journey has been short after all. He will come to you if you open His own door—the door of praise. Dear hearts, God will give you the victory.'

We did not actually rebel at the loss of her, for we were Christian people, but we grieved dreadfully. Our religion appeared to have nothing for us but a hope of meeting again sometime—a hope that kept our hearts from breaking, but was only like a ray of light in a dungeon. We dreaded the approach of Thanksgiving Day, and decided not to observe it in the usual fashion. We would remember some poor people in whom my sister had been especially interested, but we would ourselves have a plainer dinner than usual, and try to endure that vacant place at the table as best we might. It proved to be a stormy day, and when evening came we sat in the firelight too lonely and depressed to interest ourselves in anything. Suddenly father said to mother:

'Have you read Katherine's little book yet?'

Mother shook her head. Our dear one had left with us a diary of the baby's short life. We had never felt that we could open it.

'Suppose you fetch it now,' said father, 'and we will light the lamp and Florence can read aloud.'

Mother went to her room and returned with a small leather-bound blank book, and handed it to me. Father had procured a light, and I took the little volume lovingly and began to read. The first pages were a record of the happy days in Katherine's beautiful Western home when the tender mystery of their strange new dignity and blessedness was yet a cherished secret between the young wife and her husband, kept even from mother, for mother might worry, being so far away. Later, when we were allowed to share the hope and the fear, there were entries of dainty gifts from the home friends, and every page breathed of Leonard's thoughtfulness.

'Dear child!' said mother, wiping her misty spectacles, 'how happy she was!'

There was a short break in the record, and there was a telegram from home laid between the leaves, and then the simple glad-story of the new love rippled on for weeks. Then came a sudden pause and a long one of several months, when there was but one line written: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.' When Katherine came back to us she laid aside the little book; but she had reopened it and begun again just before the boy was taken ill. I will copy a few paragraphs that cover the next few days, hoping that some one may be helped even as we were in the reading:

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