

Lulu Smith

A CHILD OF
THE LIGHT



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MACHAR. A.M.

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Cordially dedicated to the Class of 1916,
Queen's University, Kingston.



A Child of the Light

“There are in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime ;—
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their inmost hearts a holy strain repeat.”

THE old heathen proverb—“Whom the gods love die young,”—is of course untenable in the light of the Christian revelation of the infinite love of our Heavenly Father for all His children. Yet there frequently occur cases in which the discipline of earthly life seems to have so early completed its work of developing the spiritual life derived from Christ, that even those who would fain have kept their beloved ones longer can discern their fitness for the purer sphere in which they enter into the fulness of life. To this class of “elect souls” the subject of the present sketch seems to belong.

“Lulu” Smith, as she was familiarly called in ordinary intercourse, was the second daughter of one of our esteemed pioneer missionaries,—the Rev. J. Fraser Smith, M.D., who labored for some years, in a two-fold capacity, in Honan, China, and in Central India,—her mother also being a faithful fellow-worker with him. She was born in 1893, at Hsin-Chen, Honan, and received the name of Margaret Lucinda, in honor of two lady missionaries at the same station, one of whom, Dr. Lucinda Graham, died suddenly in the following year, from Asiatic cholera ; while the other, Miss Margaret McIntosh, is still working faithfully in Honan.

are the scene of the story and its chief character presented in the opening paragraphs, that they seem to afford a vivid glimpse of her own sympathetic and responsive nature, and are therefore reproduced here :—

“The pitiless sun was disappearing with a dull red glow, behind the low range of western hills, and casting its last rays over the sweep of parched brown prairie—the miles of hard-baked trails, and the thousands of cattle, panting and gasping for breath, because no rain had fallen on the arid land.

“On the doorstep of a squatty, low-roofed sod shack, a faded little woman was sitting, holding her chin in her tightly knotted hands. She might have been pretty once ; but now her cheeks were pinched and pale, her hair compressed and colorless, even her coarse, homespun wrapper, faded and threadbare, seemed a part of its owner. Her eyes no longer danced and sparkled, but were gloomy and troubled, as they gazed towards the west and the setting sun.

“A flock of turkeys came round the corner of the house, cheeping for their evening meal. Mechanically she rose and fed them, then took an old hat in her hand and slowly walked out to the little rough stable, to gather eggs.

“Passing through the door, she unconsciously murmured, ‘Good-bye, old sun, please come back to-morrow.’

“Her hand stiffened on the door-latch. Could she really have uttered those words, or was she only dreaming ? Yes ! she saw a little golden-haired girl, dancing up and down along the vine-clad veranda, and eagerly waving her little handkerchief as she repeated, ‘Good-bye, old sun, please come back to-morrow !’—over and over again, till a voice from within called—‘Beth, dearie, bedtime now !’ ”

This very suggestive little life-picture shows so much sympathetic insight and power of expression, so much promise for a girl of nineteen, that we cannot be surprised at the estimate given by her professors in the class of English literature, of her work as a student. One wrote, in a testimonial given to her shortly before her death, referring to her progress in class, in the study of the English poets,—“I can witness that she has understood the mind of each, which shows a power of sympathy that will make her invaluable as a teacher of children. She has done excellent work for me—and will do honor to any educational institution to which she may be attached.” In the same strain, his colleague expressed himself, when writing to her parents after her death : —“From her I was always sure of receiving a ready hearing—an alertness of sympathetic attention which helps mightily to make one’s work agreeable. In her writings for me, she showed a ready and real wit, keen observation, and—finest of all—an unusual sensitiveness to people and experience. When I spoke to her last, I urged her to keep on writing fiction, in the hope that she might make a success of it. All that is over now!”

Lulu’s parents had somewhat dreaded her venture, at so early an age, into the unknown West, amid total strangers. But she herself seemed too happily constituted, or—in the light of after events, we might rather say,—too firmly anchored to the foundation of her earnest, simple faith, to share any such uneasiness. Though she could enter so sympathetically, as we have seen, into the needs and sorrows of others, she was herself far from taking a mournful view of life—being of a remarkably buoyant disposition, always, as it seemed, overflowing with true happiness from a perennial fountain within. Few who knew her sincere and loving Christian life could

doubt that its source was the "well of water undefiled, springing up into everlasting life." And so happy and responsive a nature could not fail to exercise a vitally beneficial influence on the group of associates among whom she was thrown during her second winter at College. Her own home, in which she had been a veritable sunbeam, was at that time transferred to her father's new charge at Glencoe, Ont., where she greatly enjoyed a brief reunion with her family on her return from the West, and during the Christmas holidays.

"She loved her home intensely," as her parents now recall with sorrowful yet sweet remembrance. "In the house she was all sunshine. Over and over again she would run up to her father, and, overflowing with joy and gladness, exclaim, 'Daddie, dear, aren't you glad your daughter is at home again?' Many times during the day she would sit down at the piano, and play and sing a verse or two of a song or hymn, and then go back to her work." Looking back over her brief life-story as a whole, it is impossible to avoid the conviction that her "sunshine" was "the light that never was on sea or land," that she "walked in the light, as a child of the light."

When she joined the little community of classmates and other student "chums" in the college halls and the Y.W. Association rooms, where she made her temporary abode, her bright personality was no less marked, and won for her respect, admiration and influence. Her musical talent was often in request, on both piano and violin, and she had a decided taste for drawing. But to her fellow-students, generally, her personality seemed to assume the character of a centre from which radiated peace, sweetness, purity and love. Those who came oftenest in contact with her testified to the rare qualities which impressed even the most thoughtless

of her companions. "She was so *good* and so *sensible*!" remarked one youth who knew her well, when speaking of her soon after the sudden calamity which had removed her from our sight. And a still warmer note of appreciation and regard seemed to be unanimous, if we can judge by the spontaneous testimonies of sorrow and affection which, after her death, poured in from both fellow-students and college authorities, collectively and individually. And there was ample evidence that her unassuming and often unconscious influence had told strongly and beneficially on the spiritual life of some of them, who, in turn, would bear its blessing to many.

Her own mind had been gradually and naturally turning towards the field of Foreign Missions, in which her parents had been reluctantly obliged to relinquish their chosen work. Having been born in China, she felt a strong hereditary link of duty drawing her towards that great nation still sitting in spiritual darkness, yet wistfully and half-consciously groping for the light. The missionary appeals that she heard at Queen's University strongly reinforced her own impulse, and, during her second and last session, she gave in her name as a volunteer for active service in China. She had thought long and seriously before deciding; but once the decision was made, she was happy in her resolve to prepare for her chosen life-work.

In the meantime she showed herself a true home missionary; for her quiet, Christian decision and penetrating influence had no little effect on her companions, and either determined or greatly strengthened the resolve of several of the young men and girls who were themselves considering the question. One of the former thus described her influence on himself, in a letter written to her parents, after her death.

“Those of us who were privileged to be her friends at College can only feel a part of your grief. But as for myself, I can never fully express my gratitude that I was permitted to come under her influence, for it was through her I was enabled to start my life fairly, guided by the Master whom she served. In our talks together serious things were never neglected, and I can see now how her influence was working slowly and steadily, guiding me towards the right. She seemed to see what I needed most—to have some purpose in life. I had not made up my mind in regard to a profession, and the question of choosing a life-work became more serious to me than it had ever seemed before. We often went together to church on Sunday evenings, and it was at such times, and when I had returned to my room, that I began to think about this, and decided to devote my life to the cause of Christ. I shall never forget those Sunday evenings! The spirit of service to a common Master seemed to dwell with us!

“I remember also a little talk I had with her one evening after church. The preacher had made some reference to the prevalence of doubt—speaking of the difficulties that I believe we all have, more or less. I remember one sentence of hers which impressed me. It was this:—‘*I never trouble about these things!*’ It seemed a fine summing up, from her viewpoint, that of simple faith in Jesus, resulting in the service of Him and of mankind. I would sometimes playfully ask her for arguments in favor of foreign missions. She would simply look at me, as if to say, ‘You know no arguments are needed!’ When she first told me that she intended to devote her life to this work, I began to talk rather lamely of self-sacrifice; but she would have nothing of this sort. I felt that she had never viewed it in this light, and it came to me suddenly and vividly, that—through *her*—I was listening to the very heart of the Master.

“One evening, when we were walking home from church, I suddenly asked her what was one of the most essential qualifications of a candidate for the ministry—what a man needed most. She seemed to understand that I was speaking of my own problem, and without hesitation she answered, in one word, ‘*Sympathy.*’ I have thought over it many times since. It seemed wonderfully suggestive and beautiful, especially when I considered that sympathy was one of the fine traits of her own character.

“If you could only realize her influence over all with whom she came in contact, I feel sure that it would comfort you greatly. Her enthusiasm for the life-work she had chosen, her many small kindnesses, her unassuming manner, all made her influence what it was, and for her friends she was a living example of the Christian life and character. And now we have only her memory, and God’s promise that we shall meet in the life everlasting.”

It is one of the mysteries that here we cannot hope to unravel, that this bright, hopeful young life, so full of rich promise and possibilities for future usefulness in Christ’s name, for the good of her fellows, should have been suddenly cut off by what seemed so casual and fortuitous an accident, whose exact cause has never been fully understood. She was just at the close of her second session, rejoicing in her anticipated return to her expectant and beloved family circle, and preparing for her last “exam.” On the night of Good Friday, she sat up late, reviewing the work for the next morning. She had just written a glad letter to her mother, destined to reach its destination after the writer had passed beyond the hopes and joys of an earthly home. Something went wrong with the lamp by which she was studying, and in her endeavor to set it right, her dress and hair became in some unknown manner

ignited. Every one else about her being asleep at the moment, the help soon rendered came too late to save her, and the shock to her system was too severe to afford any chance for recovery. All that could be done was to alleviate suffering and to make her passage through the dark valley as easy as it was possible for medical skill to do. And to a great extent, the means used were successful in soothing at least, the sense of suffering, during the few hours of life that remained. From the first, she complained little of pain, her thoughts seeming to be more of others than of herself. She seemed at once to think of the effect that hearing of the accident might exert on her mother's fragile health. "Don't let my mother know about it, till I am better," she begged more than once, "for she is not strong." But she immediately added, "If I die, it's *all right*. *I'm not afraid to die!*"

As it was thought best to remove her to the hospital, for the special treatment needed, she gently acquiesced, bidding her housemates farewell as calmly as if she were setting out on an ordinary journey. "Good-bye," she said, "and if I don't come back, remember that I love you all—every one!"

She had a special night nurse assigned to her, who said afterwards that she should never forget the impression produced by her brief watch. The patient did not talk much. Having said that she was "not afraid to die," she referred little to her own condition, her mind seeming sometimes to wander to the missionary career she had been hoping for. The approaching "exam.," too, was occupying her somewhat as the night drew to morning; and she showed that she had no consciousness of swiftly approaching death, by asking her doctor if this would be "all right," and seemed satisfied with his

affirmative reply. This question being settled, she said little more. The concerns of this life were clearly losing their hold, and she peacefully fell asleep, to awaken "satisfied with the likeness" of Him whom she had so implicitly trusted, and so truly loved.

The news of the disaster, with its terribly sudden result, came with stunning effect to her many friends in the University circle, and many hearts went out in profound sympathy towards the distant home on which such a blow must fall with crushing weight. Earnest prayers went up for them on that Saturday and Easter Sunday, and we cannot doubt that they were answered in strength given to bear the overwhelming sorrow. If anything could have alleviated this, it should have been the general and emphatic testimony so heartily and spontaneously offered by professors, friends and classmates, to the lovely Christian character of a beloved daughter and sister, and to the strong and blessed influence that she exerted on all who came within its reach.

Two of these, of a more general and official nature than the rest, are here given in full, as illustrating the remarkable and universal esteem in which this gentle, unassuming, self-forgetful young undergraduate girl was held both by Governing Board and fellow-students.

The first is from the Board of Trustees of the University, expressing their "sincere sympathy with her parents in the lamented death of your daughter while a student under our care. We learn," it proceeds, "that alike by professors and fellow-students, your daughter was greatly beloved for her noble Christian character and bearing. All saw promise of a life of great usefulness and blessing."

The other sprang from the deep and intense feeling of her special associates in Christian life and work within the University, who composed the Student Volunteer Missionary Band. "With the deepest of heartfelt sympathy, and bowed heads, our band of Christ's followers try to send, in words, our love and sympathy to the parents of our dear friend who was ever a shining light of sweetness and purity among us. She has but gone early to her reward, and yet is still with us ; for she will live in our lives, and, before God, we are stronger and nobler men and women because of what she has been to us. And through Christ, and in her memory, we shall go forth from this very Easter Sunday to tell others that Christ is risen, for we know and believe, in the depths of our inmost being, that we shall some day rejoin you and our dear sister, and we shall all then *understand!* We are all praying for you this night and this Easter week."

Such words speak volumes for the life that inspired them. They seem to individualize for us the idea expressed by the saintly Keble in one of his finest poems :

"Oh soothe us, haunt us, night and day,
Ye gentle spirits far away,
With whom we shared the cup of grace
And parted—ye to Christ's embrace,—
We to the lonesome world again,
Yet mindful of the unearthly strain.
Practised with you at Eden's door,
To be sung on, where angels soar
With blended voices evermore."

A. M. Machar.